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# TURN YOUR HOBBY *into a* BUSINESS



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## TURN YOUR HOBBY INTO A BUSINESS...

At *Country Living*, we have always been inspired by enterprising women who turn their talent into turnover by setting up their dream business. It's our privilege to feature their stories in the magazine every month to encourage others to follow in their footsteps. Here, we present our favourites from recent years with additional expert tips on how to avoid the usual stumbling blocks. Whether your passion is for gardening, crafting, cooking, collecting or beauty, we have a wealth of ideas for earning a living from the kitchen table. Plus, we've put together a special section for those of you who plan to welcome customers into a bustling enterprise – from a unique pet-boarding service to a boutique glamping site. And if you find the idea of launching a start-up rather daunting, our step-by-step guides will smooth the way to success.



*Dory Amick*

Editor-in-chief,  
*Country Living* Magazine

PS For further inspiration, don't miss the *Let Your Talent Shine* series in every issue of *Country Living*





COUNTRY LIVING

# TURN YOUR HOBBY *into a* BUSINESS

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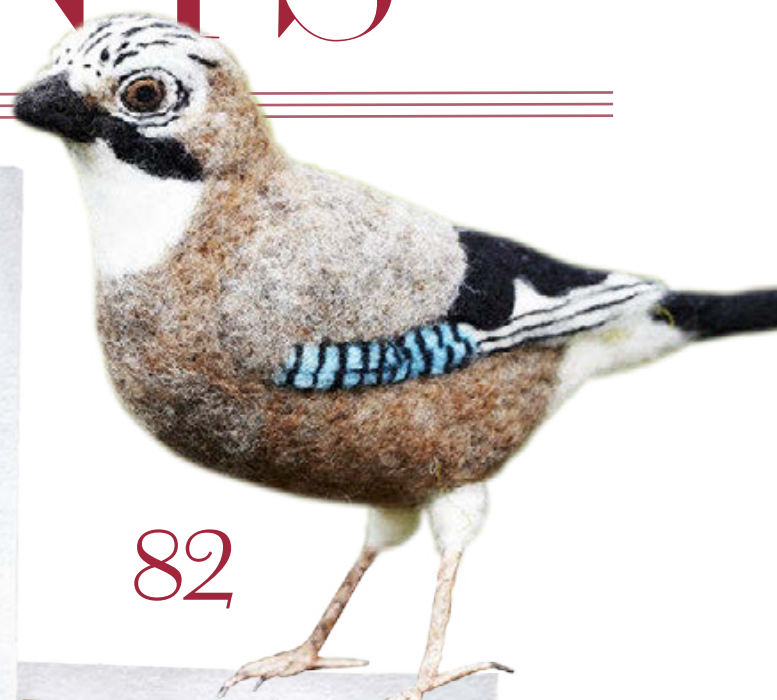
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## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE #1:

# *How to get an idea off the ground*

**IF YOU ARE THINKING OF TURNING YOUR TALENT INTO TURNOVER**, you are joining thousands of successful entrepreneurs. Take *Country Living* contributor Julie Dodsworth ([juliedodsworth.co.uk](http://juliedodsworth.co.uk)), who started painting pots on her narrow boat in 2007 and now sells her enormous product range in more than 500 shops in 20 countries, plus has licensing deals with big brands. She still makes the time to paint five times a week – at heart it is still her hobby, albeit one that is also an international business.

**HOWEVER, BEFORE YOU TAKE THE FIRST STEP**, consider that turning your hobby into a business will change your perspective. Having spent many years honing your skills, how will you feel when what you previously did for pure pleasure needs financial investment, customers, sales and a consistent flow of products? Be sure that you can maintain your

enthusiasm and passion for your craft if you are working to deadlines and need to worry about profit.

### **START OUT BY CANVASSING OPINION ABOUT YOUR CONCEPT.**

Friends and family are the obvious people to approach first, but don't forget they are not always objective; they don't want to hurt you. Try to widen your research circle by going along to local business networks or talking to advisors (often, local

councils provide a free start-up clinic). Online forums are a good source of information, as are, of course, your fellow hobbyists. Many new entrepreneurs worry that their idea will be stolen by an unscrupulous rival. In reality, very little is unique (with the exception of high-tech businesses) and if your idea really is completely different from anything else available, ask yourself why it hasn't already been done. Perhaps

there just isn't a market for it. Try not to let worrying about competition stop you from taking advice and talking to others – you could be jeopardising your chances of ever starting. Have a look at the Intellectual Property resources available at the British Library and remember that competition is a good thing; you just have to be better, brighter and a little bit different.

### **NEXT, START TO BUILD ON THE IDEA;**

this is not your business plan (which will come later), this is the visualising stage. What will your product or service look like? How much will it cost and how does that compare with others in the same market? Who are your customers and how will you attract them? How much free time do you realistically have and how much money do you need to make? Creative people tend to be very visual, so try using a storyboard to pull all your different ideas together;

**CONSIDER HOW THE NEW BUSINESS WILL IMPACT ON YOU, your family and your other commitments.** Be honest: have you got what it takes to be your own boss? Do you have the right skills, confidence and personality? Being self-employed is not for the faint-hearted – the hours are long and the money often isn't good to begin with. Write out the positives and negatives on a piece of A4, then throw it away, as the fact you'll be making a living doing what you love balances out the bad points. The first step is the hardest; many people have a great idea but it remains just that. At some point, you have to take the leap.





**SET YOURSELF SHORT-, MEDIUM- AND LONG-TERM GOALS FOR THE BUSINESS AND FOR YOURSELF:** what you want the business to look like in six months, in two years, in ten years, and what you personally want to achieve, be it satisfaction, financial freedom or a luxurious lifestyle. Whatever your business and personal goals are, write them down and keep them visible. Evaluate and alter them as the business changes and grows; keeping your aims in mind makes you more accountable and forces you to take action.

collect pictures, ideas, words and tag lines – making a private Pinterest board is ideal ([pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com)).

#### **ARM YOURSELF WITH INFORMATION AT THIS POINT.**

Look at how others in your sector run their business, sign up for their online newsletters and read their blogs, buy their products and note everything you like and don't like about their customer service. Do desk research into the whole sector, read reports and find trade magazines. The more you know at this stage, the

better prepared you will be when you start.

#### **FINALLY, CHOOSE A LAUNCH DATE.**

You may not be physically opening the doors but the self-imposed time frame will give a sense of urgency. Try to have everything lined up and ready for then, including products or services, marketing material, website, business plan and finance. On that day, you change from being a hobbyist to a businesswoman. It is sure to do wonders for your confidence and self-belief.

## TIPS FOR FLEDGLING SELLERS

### ALTERNATIVES

Selling your product isn't the only option; you could supply other hobbyists, mend, send, pack, frame or teach – the list is endless.

### RESEARCH

Stop thinking of yourself as a customer and research the industry with detachment (this time, you are not buying wool or silk – you are watching how it is sold).

### PRECISION

Whatever you sell, it has to be perfect, every time. Be hyper-critical of yourself and your product, and ask others to give honest feedback (it's better to feel momentarily hurt than lose income).






# Cook bake & preserve

Develop your appetite for fresh ingredients to create a simple but successful business









FOOD & DRINK

# A TASTE OF THE WILD

Jade Mellor transforms edible treasures foraged from the abundant hedgerows and ancient woodlands of West Wales into delicious foods that celebrate the flavours of each season

WORDS BY LOUISE ELLIOTT • PHOTOGRAPHS BY JASON INGRAM









**I**n the golden sunlight of autumn, Jade Mellor can often be found sitting outside her wild-food kitchen in the garden of her West Wales home, carefully preparing the fruits she has gathered from the patchwork of fields and hedgerows beyond. Sloes, rosehips, blackberries, damsons and apples fill old baskets and trugs, ready to be made into delicious foods that capture the flavours of the season. “I feel a bit like a squirrel at this time of year,” she says. “But I only gather what is abundant and always leave more than I take, so there’s enough left for wildlife and to go to seed. I’ve been returning to the same places for years, and there’s still plenty growing.”

Late autumn is a particularly magical time for Jade’s forays and she prefers to

head to her favourite, off-the-beaten-track spots in the afternoon when the sun has warmed the fruit. Red berries and black sloes stand out like gems against the blue skies, while the oak, bracken and beech trees are ablaze with colour. “I watch the birds,” Jade explains. “They always know exactly when the fruit is ripe.” Locals will also alert her to secret areas, including an abandoned walled garden where she gathers quince and medlars from the old, gnarled trees for her syrups, pickles and preserves. “If you want to sell foraged food, you need the landowner’s permission first,” she adds. “As I harvest, I feel inspired about what to make. I have tried-and-trusted recipes but experiment and develop my range, too.”

## GATHERING INSPIRATION

The sweet, heavenly aroma drifting out from Jade’s shed at this time of year is evidence of one of her most innovative introductions – chocolates filled with autumn berries. “I had been making liqueurs using whole fruit and wondered what I could do with this afterwards,” she recalls. “I began incorporating them into confectionery and the idea grew from there.” She now produces chocolate-coated, alcohol-steeped





damsons, which last up to three months, as well as others made with fresh finds, such as her bilberry and coconut cream truffles, which are best eaten within a few days.

Since moving from Whitstable to Penbontirhydyfothau, a hamlet of 12 houses in a wooded valley that leads down to the sea near Cwm Tydu, ten years ago, to live with her partner, woodsman Benjamin Grey, Jade has discovered a wonderful wild larder on her doorstep. Foraging has become her passion but she believes it was always in her blood: “My parents met when they were hop-picking in Kent, so I was born to be a picker! I developed a love of plants as an adult when I worked for a small cider farm, and I also trained as a gardener at Hadlow College in Canterbury. When I came here, though, I felt I’d really struck gold.”

Benjamin gradually introduced her to the edible treasures to be found in the ancient oak woods of West Wales – wood sorrel, oyster mushrooms and tree blossoms. Wanting to learn as much as she could about the local flora, she studied plants throughout the seasons, examining each one in all its stages. Only once she’d done this did Jade feel confident enough to pick, eat and cook with it. Initially, she was collecting wild green leaves – dandelions, sorrel, sea beet, purslane, samphire, pennywort and hairy bittercress – which she supplied to a local forager. “It was a great introduction to the idea of earning an income from wild food,” Jade recalls, “but I wanted to create more of a natural cycle – to cook with my finds and get local people interested – so the obvious progression was to set up on my own.”

Taking inspiration from old books on traditional recipes and exploring different flavours, Jade developed a collection of pestos and syrups. To get feedback on these, she set up a stall at Aberystwyth market in ➔



TO GET DIRECT  
FEEDBACK ON HER  
NEW COLLECTION OF  
PESTOS AND SYRUPS,  
JADE TOOK A STALL  
AT ABERYSTWYTH  
MARKET





## Growing your wild business

### BEING LIMITED BY THE SEASONS

could make it difficult to expand the enterprise by increasing the volume of produce. But the current interest in foraging means there are plenty of people who want to learn the art, which is best done through experience rather than books. So offering customers the opportunity to understand more about the food growing around them might not only be a way to grow your business but will also allow you to position yourself as an expert in your field.

**WALKING IN THE WOODS** with a group of clients is not a great leap from foraging alone; it is just a case of providing a structured session based on your skills and knowledge of the countryside. You will already have the best routes and the permission of the landowner, so all you need to add is public liability insurance and possibly a disclaimer. You could offer options depending on the time of year, so customers can return.

**CONSIDER CREATING A COMMUNITY** around foraging and what you make. It is easy to do using social media, Pinterest boards with pictures and recipes or a blog – you will soon become the go-to guide. Use the time with customers as a marketing opportunity. Offer goody bags with samples of foods for your group to take home.



## INCOME FROM WILD-FOOD WALKS AND WORKSHOPS, WHEN JADE HELPS OTHERS CONNECT WITH NATURE, NOW ACCOUNTS FOR AROUND HALF OF HER PROFITS

autumn 2009 and her business Wild Pickings was born. Laden with cakes, chocolates, preserves, cordials, syrups and salts, her stand there today shows how far her range has come – and she is now able to make a living from foraging.

### A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

Cooking and preparation is done in the shed, which overlooks the south-facing garden and beyond to the valley. It was converted three years ago, although in winter Jade will also make use of the wood-fired range in the cottage. “I bought vintage units to fit the space and had stainless-steel tops made for them,” she says. “Crucially, I liaised with the local environmental health officer so everything would meet their requirements.” With only a gas oven and no electricity, all mixing, mashing and chopping is done by

hand, while she uses an old-fashioned food mill for straining and a cast-iron juicer and jelly stand for syrups, jams and pickles. Wooden shelves hold jars and bottles waiting to be labelled for market, while preserving pans hang from the walls and the collection of spoons, boards and ladles, fashioned by Benjamin on a traditional pole lathe, meets every culinary need.

On a golden autumn afternoon, Jade can be found preparing a batch of sloe-gin truffles, using fruit steeped in alcohol for at least a year. Removing the stones, she mashes the residue with syrup, a glug of gin and melted Fairtrade chocolate. Without the use of a thermometer, she expertly tempers another batch of chocolate by eye to ensure it will set to a glossy finish, dollops this into a mould and places the fruit mixture inside. If it's a



particularly chilly day, she might do this in the kitchen of her cottage, where she packages her creations inside gold paper boxes tied up with string, ready to be sold at markets, local food shops and through her website.

### **PRESERVING TRADITION**

Medlar jellies, pickled quince, rosehip syrup, spicy hawthorn ketchup and pickled crab apples are among her other autumn creations, and some of the ingredients will have been gathered from the two woodlands that Jade and Benjamin own. One is a 23-acre patch close to the sea, surrounded by sheltered meadows, where he teaches sustainable woodland management and green woodworking.

"I'm out foraging in every season, though. I love working outside in all weathers, getting battered by the wind and the rain, as well as soaking up the sunshine," Jade says. "Spring is the time for wild greens and blossoms, which I turn into pestos and cordials. In summer, I gather lots of sea vegetables such as samphire and purslane for pickles. Then, when the tides are low in winter, I collect seaweeds to dry and toast for seasonings and salts." From April to October, she'll also be busy helping other people – a mix of locals and holidaymakers – connect with nature on her wild-food walks and workshops, identifying and harvesting plants to cook together in her kitchen.

Income from these now accounts for half of the profits. With all aspects of the business, it's Jade's passion and enthusiasm for nature and sustainable living that governs her decisions: "I want to stay small and bespoke, hand-making everything. I never want to expand into something that neither I nor the planet can sustain. Foraging means staying true to your roots." ■

**i Wild Pickings (01239 654021; [wildpickings.co.uk](http://wildpickings.co.uk)).**





FOOD & DRINK

# BOTTLING A DREAM

Paul and Lynn Langham once had no idea that vines could grow in this country – now they're producing award-winning wines from grapes harvested from their farm

WORDS BY LOUISE ELLIOTT • PHOTOGRAPHS BY TARA FISHER







harvest time is a decidedly bucolic affair at a'Beckett's Vineyard, planted on the gentle slopes of a Wiltshire valley on the edge of Salisbury Plain. Owners Paul and Lynn Langham, helped by two part-time staff and a band of volunteers, gather in the bunches of plump grapes by hand, as the autumn sunshine begins to transform the vine leaves into rich reds and burnished yellows. There's a buzz of excitement in the air as a mountain of fruit begins to form on the trailer and their hard work turns into a successful harvest before their eyes. In just 15 years Paul and Lynn have come a long way in developing the business, and the second generation of the family are now part of the team.

## NEW DIRECTIONS

When the Langhams moved from Northamptonshire to the rural Wiltshire village of Market Lavington in 1994, they had vague thoughts of doing something different with their lives. "I was working in IT and marketing for an American multinational and Lynn was a legal secretary but we knew we



didn't want to stay on the corporate ladder for much longer," Paul explains. Having toyed with various ideas, he had his moment of revelation five years later. "It was the summer of June 1999 and we were sitting in the garden with a glass of wine. I said to Lynn, 'Why don't we have our own vineyard and make wine?' From then on, the idea grew."

Many might have been daunted by the magnitude of the project, but Paul drew on his business background and knew research was the way forward. "Initially we had no idea that you could even grow vines in this country and

WITHIN TWO  
YEARS OF HAVING  
THE IDEA, THEY HAD  
PREPARED SIX ACRES OF  
LAND AND PLANTED  
FIVE VARIETIES OF  
GRAPEVINE

explored the idea of moving to France, but then we discovered a map of English vineyards and began visiting them," Paul says. "We had the plan but no idea where to go."

The answer actually lay close to their own home, in the neighbouring village of Littleton Panell. "I suddenly remembered a'Beckett's, which had been a thriving commercial fruit farm," Lynn says. "The owner had recently died and we thought we might be able to buy the land from his daughters." By the end of 2000, the 30-acre farm was theirs – all they needed next were ➡





the vines and plenty of stamina. In the course of their research, they discovered Vigo, a Devon company that could supply them with both equipment and plants. “They also offered the services of one of their consultants free if you bought 5,000 vines – so we ordered 5,100,” Paul recalls. Fortunately, the consultation confirmed what they hoped – that the sheltered site had free-draining soil descending to chalk and its own micro-climate. In short, everything a vine could want. By April 2001, they had six acres of land ploughed and ready. Helped by friends and family, they painstakingly planted a mixture of Pinot Noir, Pinot Auxerrois, Reichensteiner, Seyval Blanc and Dunkelfelder vines by hand, protecting each tender stem to shield them from rabbits. “It took about two weeks,” Lynn says, “and we all heaved a collective sigh of relief when the first shoots began to appear.”

### LABOUR OF LOVE

The next two years were a waiting period as the plants established their deep-rooting systems while Paul and Lynn learnt how to trim the side shoots to establish a strong single stem. “This makes the plant feel under threat and encourages it to produce the best

grapes – vines don’t like an easy life,” Paul explains. Amazingly, apart from a short wine-making course at Plumpton College in East Sussex, he has taught himself everything along the way. The farm was originally parkland for a 19th-century manor house, but the two were divided in the 1960s. In 2003, Paul and Lynn moved the family (sons Benjamin and Matthew, and daughter Victoria) into the more modern property so they could spend every working hour at the vineyard. And in the autumn of that year they enjoyed their first harvest, picking three-quarters of a tonne of grapes.

The volume of fruit steadily increased over the next few years, with a bumper crop of 21 tonnes in 2006. In 2010, they planted an additional 5,000 vines, expanding the vineyard to ten acres. They are currently producing 12,000-20,000 bottles of red, white, rosé and sparkling a year, depending on growing conditions. All of the alcohol is made at their winery under the guidance of winemaker Steve Brooksbank but with Paul and Lynn involved at every stage. The process varies according to the type of wine but involves de-stemming and pressing the fruit, adding yeast to promote

## Discover winemaking

**THERE ARE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ALL OVER THE COUNTRY,** but most focus on the tasting of wine. That might be a very good place to start, however; you will at least understand the industry from the point of view of the consumer. The

Wine & Spirit Education Trust ([wsetglobal.com](http://wsetglobal.com)) runs classes covering grape varieties, the wine-making process and how to select a bottle.

**IF YOU ARE KEEN TO PURSUE A CAREER IN WINE,** Plumpton College in East Sussex

([plumpton.ac.uk](http://plumpton.ac.uk)) offers a wide range of courses that are focused on the business and cover everything from how to grow vines to selling your products.

**LIKE ALL FOOD AND DRINK BUSINESSES,** yours will

be subject to rules and regulations, and it is wise to remember that there are additional tax implications with selling wine. A professional course will guide you and support you through these potential challenges, so it is a good idea to do one.



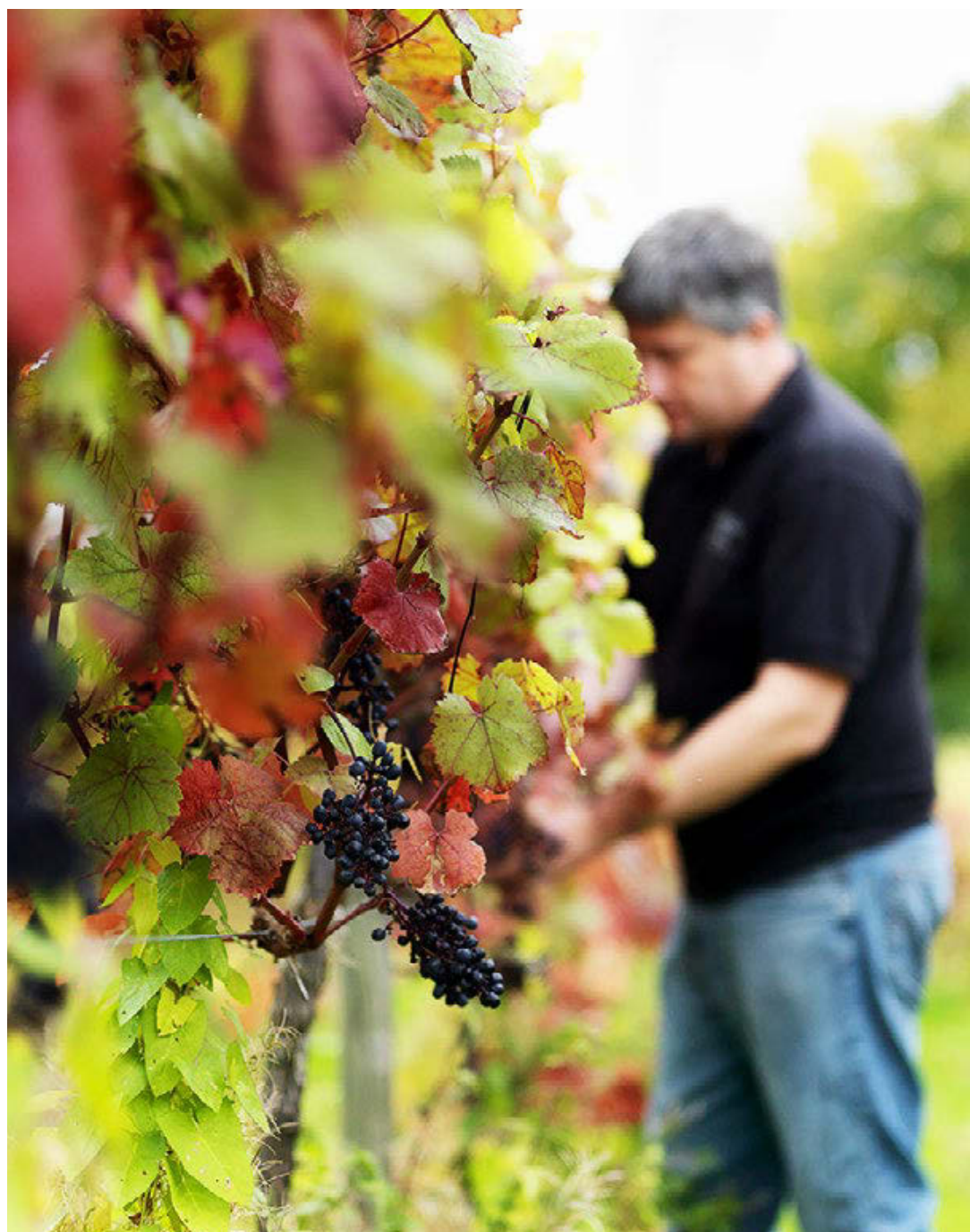
fermentation, filtering, blending and bottling. The wines, which are suitable for vegans, are sold from a small shop at the vineyard, via their website and nationally distributed through Bibendum Wines. Over the years, they have won many awards, including silver and bronze medals at the English and Welsh Wine of the Year competition, and Wessex Wine of the Year for their rosé.

Paul, in particular, relishes the outside work: “It’s so different from office life and quite energising. You really notice the progress of the seasons, and how the landscape changes – from the first greens of spring in the woodlands to the glowing colours of the vines in autumn.”

From January to March, the couple’s days are spent pruning, weeding and maintaining the trellises, while also bottling and blending the previous year’s vintage. In springtime, the vines come to life, flowering at the end of June, when it’s time for spraying and disease control. By September, the grapes have set and their thoughts turn to the next month’s harvest. “We pick a bunch and test for sugar and acidity to see if they are ready. But we can’t do this if they’re wet, so I do get nervous about the weather,” Paul says.

## BEARING FRUIT

Alongside the vineyard, the couple have also managed to find time to turn their attention to the assets they had inherited with the land – the orchard and its six acres of 600 old apple trees, including Ellison’s Orange, Laxton’s Superb, James Grieve and Egremont Russet. “We started picking the fruit and tending the trees, and now press the apples ourselves to make juice and cider,” Paul says. They have added 50 cider trees and 40 perry pear trees as well. Paul also noticed that crops from local orchards and trees were not being harvested, and began buying up unwanted fruit to add to his own. He




has been running a community project, too, encouraging people to visit the vineyard to have a crop of apples pressed into juice they can take away. In addition, they have hives, selling jars of honey made by a local beekeeper, and run wine tours around the estate.

“I love working from home,” Paul says, “while also producing something I’m passionate about.” The vineyard is very much a long-term project with Paul on a mission to change people’s perceptions of English wine. ■

**i aBeckett's Vineyard (01380 816669; abecketts.co.uk).**







FOOD & DRINK

# LIFE IS SWEET

Inspired by French artisan makers, Nigel and Mary Rumsey have created a chocolate-lover's heaven that showcases their skills and enterprising ideas

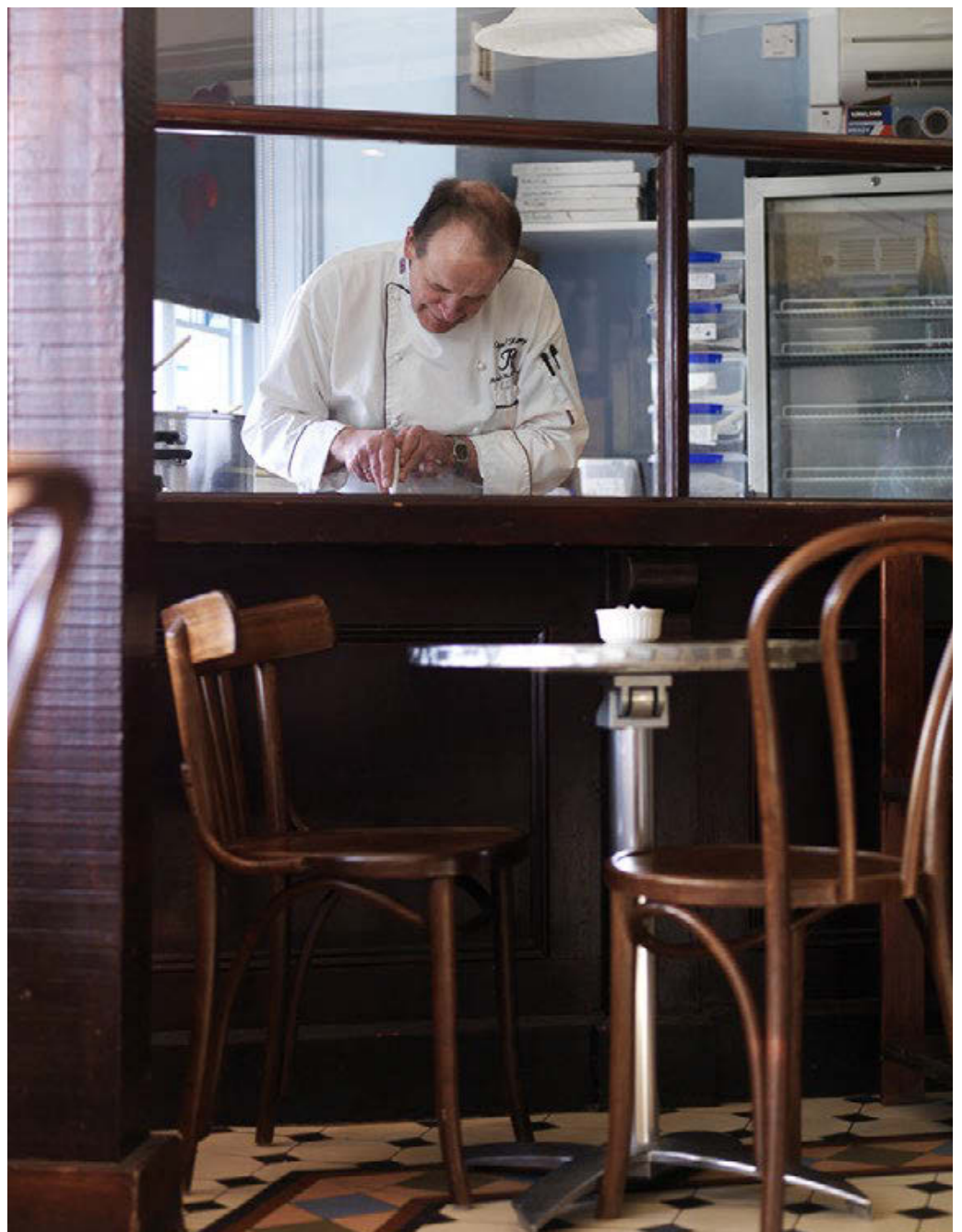
WORDS BY CATHERINE BUTLER • PHOTOGRAPHS BY CRISTIAN BARNETT





Step inside Rumsey's Chocolaterie and there will be no doubt in your mind that chocolate is the real food of love: foil-wrapped bars of it that break with a satisfying snap; bite-sized domes of it that melt irresistibly on your tongue; even a hot steaming mug of it – deliciously rich and aromatic. “It’s all handmade,” says Nigel Rumsey, a patissier-turned-chocolatier, who, along with his wife, Mary, started the business just over 12 years ago in the kitchen of their home in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire. “Fresh chocolate tastes completely different to the version you buy in a newsagent’s,” he says with passion. “It has a higher cocoa content, so you get a purer hit and the flavours are more intense. There’s nothing like it.”

At the chocolaterie in Thame, Oxfordshire, the blue door swings open, the Victorian brass till’s bell is ringing and the coffee machines whir away in the background. Waiters and waitresses carry trays of the couple’s own-blend coffee, pastries and light lunches to customers taking in the cocoa scents and enjoying the atmosphere at the assortment of wooden and marble-topped café tables. Shelves of Cellophane-wrapped chocolate hearts are emptying quickly and a huddle is forming around the chiller cabinets ➡







for the red-ribboned boxes of vanilla creams, champagne truffles and a speciality created with sweet-toothed men in mind: chocolate barrels of ale-flavoured ganache. This husband-and-wife team opened their first chocolaterie in Wendover, Buckinghamshire, in February 2004; three years later, they established their second café-cum-chocolate shop in Thame. “We make around 3,000 chocolates in a normal week, but at busy times, it can be four times as much,” Mary says. A former school teacher, she runs the business side of the shops and is chief taster, but is also ready to turn her hand to serving and even the washing-up when it becomes frantic.



## A STRONG VISION

The couple refurbished both shop premises themselves with great attention to detail: “They needed a complete overhaul – the Wendover branch had been an old bank, while Thame’s is a former butcher’s,” says Mary, who trawled salvage yards, ebay and even a sale at a BBC prop cupboard to kit out the cafés in a nostalgic 1930s style. Cornflower-blue walls, vintage opaque glass ceiling lamps and oak fixtures and fittings mean there is an abundance of Gallic charm. In fact, customers could be forgiven for a sense of déjà-vu; the transformation of Rumsey’s from a kitchen start-up to two bustling cafés and the Cocoa Pod (their chocolate school based in Stone, Buckinghamshire) was inspired by Vianne’s shop in the film adaptation of Joanne Harris’s *Chocolat*.

The ingredients of the business first came together in 1991. Nigel had been a pastry chef for 20 years and was working in the kitchens of Oxford’s New College when a colleague asked him to produce a batch of chocolates for Christmas. Nigel enjoyed it so much that he made a second lot for his own family. Then, after Mary’s sister Sheila sold out of the bags of chocolates she had showcased in her hair salon, the couple wasted no time in researching and organising packaging so they could take a stall at a local craft fair: “Soon we were supplying gift boxes to nearby Waddesdon Manor and crested chocolates to the Oxford colleges.” As word spread, Nigel cut his job down to a three-day week to meet demand.

## SETTING UP SHOP

It wasn’t just the scent of rich dark chocolate wafting out of the kitchen: the business began to spill over into the rest of the house, so the couple built an extension to give more room to Nigel and Madeleine, the kitchen assistant he had hired. When they entered the Great Taste Awards in 2003 and won gold for their Orange Seville Chocolate, as well as receiving accolades for their vanilla and sparkling elderflower wine creations, they realised this could be





the full-time business of their dreams. “We knew that if we were going to earn a living from it, we needed a shop,” Nigel explains. “When customers called by, they enjoyed watching me making the chocolates, so we decided to have a theatre kitchen where people could see me at work, and then thought we’d serve hot drinks and food, too. Within six months, we had found premises and opened our doors.” Ten years on, Nigel employs six chocolate chefs in total, the majority of whom he has trained himself.

Provenance is something the Rumseys take as seriously as their chocolate: “We draw on fresh, local produce and support the area’s businesses wherever possible,” Mary explains. “Each month, we buy £1,200-worth of milk and cream from a local dairy farm called Laceys in High Wycombe, where each cow is known by name, and 800 eggs from hens kept by the father of one of our weekend boys.” In return, an army of devoted customers has fallen for Rumsey’s charms. “One day there was a snowstorm,” Nigel recalls, “and people piled into the shop for hot chocolate after tobogganing. Everyone was chatting and laughing. I remember thinking, ‘This is what it’s all about.’” ■

📞 *Rumsey’s of Thame (01844 260303); Rumsey’s of Wendover (01296 625060; rumseys.co.uk).*

“WE DECIDED TO  
CREATE A THEATRE  
KITCHEN SO CUSTOMERS  
COULD WATCH ME  
MAKING THE  
CHOCOLATES”



## How to be a chocolatier

### CHOCOLATE IS A LOVELY PRODUCT

to work with but not the easiest. Arm yourself with information and brush up on professional skills first – disasters can be very expensive.

**THE SCHOOL OF ARTISAN FOOD** in Nottinghamshire offers regular professional courses on how to cook with chocolate, as well as ones covering the business side and an introduction to food photography, which could be very important especially if you are selling online ([schoolofartisanfood.org](http://schoolofartisanfood.org)).

**THE ARTISAN CHOCOLATE WORKSHOP** is a mobile training provider teaching one-to-one sessions for budding chocolatiers throughout the South East, covering everything you need to start your business ([artisanchocolateworkshop.com](http://artisanchocolateworkshop.com)).





FOOD & DRINK

# RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Joanna Brennan welcomes you into the Suffolk village café and bakery she set up with her father and reveals her recipe for success

WORDS BY CATHERINE BUTLER ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY LYDIA EVANS



# Pump Street BAKERY

REAL BREAD & SLOW FOOD







CHRIS TAUGHT  
HIMSELF HOW TO  
BAKE – FIRST BREADS  
AND THEN FRENCH  
PASTRIES – BEFORE  
INSTALLING AN  
INDUSTRIAL-SIZE OVEN  
IN HIS OFFICE



You don't pass through Orford. This small East Anglian village is at the very end of a single road, beyond which is the North Sea. Yet long before the lunchtime rush begins at Pump Street Bakery, Joanna Brennan and her staff have already served dozens of locals and visitors alike. The scored roundels of sourdough, tin loaves and piles of baguettes are disappearing fast from behind the counter, buttery croissants are presented with pots of tea, and custard tarts and Eccles cakes are being packaged in brown paper bags to accompany cups of takeaway coffee. "Running my own café seemed like a pipe dream – but now it's a reality and I couldn't be happier," says Joanna, as she chucks up the blackboard with the day's menu. There's the sound of friendly chatter from the long oak table at the centre of the bakery where people eat, talk, pore over newspapers or just watch the world go by, while enjoying the warmth from the woodburning stove.

## PRIME PRODUCE

As well as creating the right setting, Joanna is a self-confessed foodaholic. Seasonal fruit and vegetables, some of which is delivered on foot to her door, are a strong feature of the lunches, as is local free-range pork, salad leaves from a nearby producer that are often picked and eaten the same day, and traditional cheeses from Neal's Yard Dairy; and she serves only artisan Monmouth coffee, following barista training at the award-winning company. Much thought is put into planning each bowl of steaming stew and generously stacked sandwich, with everything designed to showcase the main attraction: her father Chris's baking. "When I worked as an IT manager, I had meetings in France, where the bread is baked every morning," Chris says. "Then I'd return to London to plastic-wrapped





loaves full of preservatives.” So, with a breadmaker and a pile of books, he taught himself to bake – first tin baguettes, then sourdough and French pastries – before installing an industrial-size oven in his home office, often putting business calls on hold when the bread was ready. In 1999, Chris retired to Orford and it was there that he discovered the other principle on which Pump Street Bakery was founded – community. When the local primary school needed money for a new fence, Chris began getting up at 4am every Saturday to bake and fundraise at Orford’s market. Soon customers were queuing the length of the square for his loaves and Eccles cakes: “People kept asking if I was going to open a bakery, which the village hadn’t had since the Second World War. But it wasn’t until 2009, when a shop became available, that I began to take the idea seriously.”

### THE DREAM TEAM

Town planners declined Chris’s application to convert the cellar of a 15th-century building into a bakery, which turned out to be a stroke of luck, especially for Joanna. “Dad found new premises in converted farm buildings, which meant there was the opportunity to turn the shop into a café,” she says. “I’d always wanted to work with food, so I gave up my job as a speech therapist in London and moved to Suffolk to run it.” Joanna spent the early days preparing the lunches but now manages ten



part-time staff, including her mother Frances, and fits running the café around planning menus, sourcing produce, paperwork and all the networking and social media she says is vital for keeping a small business on track. The bakery, too, is growing. Chris has been joined by David, Andy and Angelo, who work shifts from 1am-2pm to cover the orders from the café, local pubs and restaurants. And there’s Cedric, a 1981 Citroën H van used to sell their bread throughout Suffolk. Downstairs, in the patisserie department, Maxine – who had no baking experience when she started four years ago – runs





the show, hand-rolling croissants, crafting palmiers and filling sausage rolls, helped by Lance, Katie and Harry. Chris now devotes most of his time to developing the range of single-origin handmade Pump Street chocolate and overseeing the bakery. “I don’t regret not becoming a baker sooner, but the past four years have been more fulfilling than three decades in IT,” he says.

On an average Saturday, they sell 125 baguettes and 180 loaves of sourdough. Any leftovers are taken to the family shelter West Villa Hostel in Ipswich, while 20p of every Orford white or granary loaf is donated to the Orford Community Fund to support local initiatives. According to Joanna, that’s been part of their success: “We did something we cared about, and people responded. If you want to succeed, you have to put your heart into it.”

**Pump Street Bakery** (01394 459829; [pumpstreetbakery.com](http://pumpstreetbakery.com)).



## Our path to success



### BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Running a café is hard work: 8am starts, then, after the doors close, there’s cleaning and paperwork – social media can take up to three hours a day. I’ve had to sacrifice weekends and decline social invitations, but having job satisfaction makes it worthwhile.

### DID YOU HAVE EXPERIENCE?

I had a work placement in two restaurant kitchens, which was helpful: in catering you need to juggle several tasks at once as well as manage people. Luckily, Dad has a natural talent for the financial side, and a strong vision helped.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU’D KNOWN BEFORE STARTING?

I wish I had been savvier about technology. I had to learn how to update the website, create a blog and make social media work – we use it to network

with suppliers, customers and other bakeries, and even recruit staff.

### PROUDEST MOMENT?

We were joint winners of Best Food Producer at the BBC Radio 4 Food and Farming Awards 2012. In 2011 we won Best Bakery and then Best Café last year at the Suffolk Food and Drink Awards.

### BEST THING ABOUT THE CAFÉ?

Knowing my customers by name and how they like their coffee. People asked why we didn’t open in London, but we might not have had the same personal connection. It’s also lovely working with Dad – I’ve learned so much from him.

### ADVICE TO OTHERS?

Being flexible can be invaluable. Our business plan wasn’t too rigid, which meant we could seize opportunities – such as buying the van.



# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

## *café & bakery*

### DO YOUR RESEARCH

**YOUR MARKET** Identify the people you want to attract, as this will affect what you serve, as well as the look and feel of your café. Get to know your potential customers – which shops they visit, what they read, who they are influenced by. Carry out this research on the high street with a clipboard or using online survey tools such as Wufoo ([wufoo.com](http://wufoo.com)) and SurveyMonkey ([surveymonkey.com](http://surveymonkey.com)). Look at local businesses to see who they are attracting and what they do well, and not so well, as this opens up opportunities. Before committing to an area, test your market, product and prices by using a temporary venue. Pop-up ventures offer a low-cost route to make sales and can ensure there's enough demand for a permanent shop. Visit [startupbritain.co](http://startupbritain.co) for details.

### SETTING UP

**PREMISES** Find the ideal space through local estate agents and on billboards in your chosen locations. When you move in, use a checklist to prioritise tasks. **HEALTH AND SAFETY** Whether you're making or preparing food, regulations apply and



you will need to register the premises with the environmental health service at your local authority at least 28 days before opening – find registration advice via the Government's Food Standards Agency at [food.gov.uk](http://food.gov.uk). Plus, arrange insurance to protect you, the business and customers.

**STYLE AND DESIGN** If budgets are tight, beg, borrow and barter to kit out the café and decorate it. Consider your research: what style appeals to your customers? Classical music and a homely feel or a contemporary design and modern food? Be prepared to refine this as you receive feedback: invite it via social media such as Twitter and Facebook, by displaying feedback cards or simply asking customers.

**SERVICE** You are your own brand and will represent it well. Ensure your staff do the same by giving them quality training. Involve family members – they are trusted and cost-effective employees.

### START TRADING

**PROMOTION** Get to know the local and national media that cover your type of café. Send press releases, high-quality images and details of new products and upcoming events. Embrace social media so others can spread the word on your behalf, and create an online presence with sites such as [wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com), [wix.com](http://wix.com) and [create.net](http://create.net), keeping it updated so people can engage with you outside opening hours.

**OFFERS** Provide customers with deals that can be tweeted and 'liked' on Facebook, creating a buzz around your brand.

**ADDED EXTRAS** Hosting events in the café gives people another reason to visit. These could be paid-for talks, tastings and food demonstrations, or hosted for free to reinforce your customers' bond with the business.

**SUPPORT NETWORK** Get to know some fellow entrepreneurs in the same field. Most areas have food and drink groups such as Taste North East ([tastenortheast.co.uk](http://tastenortheast.co.uk)) and Heart of England Fine Foods ([heff.co.uk](http://heff.co.uk)), which offer support as well as partnership opportunities.

**NEW INCOME** Once you're selling successfully, consider new income streams such as on-site training or cooking sessions and a line of 'products by post'. Branch out into supplying local restaurants or pitch to national retailers through programmes such as PitchUp! ([startupbritain.co](http://startupbritain.co)) or with advice from organisations including Food Business Start-up Boot Camp ([moniqueborst.com](http://moniqueborst.com)) and Enterprise Nation ([enterprisenation.com](http://enterprisenation.com)).





## FOOD & DRINK

# SUMMER IS SERVED

Discover how young entrepreneur Stephany Hardingham revived her family's business to produce refreshing desserts with a true taste of the countryside

WORDS BY AMANDA HOWARD ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURA EDWARDS

Fields and hedgerows are cast a vivid green in the glassy light of early summer at Alder Carr, a 50-acre farm in Suffolk. Families make their way around the rows of pick-your-own strawberries, two ponies methodically graze the grass nearby and the citrusy aroma of elderflower fills the air. Stephany Hardingham is collecting the heads of these frothy white blooms and placing them in an apple-picking hod inherited from her grandmother.

This romantic scene has its roots firmly in the past, but Stephany is very much a modern businesswoman: she will use the fragrant harvest, along with gooseberries, in a delicately flavoured cream ice destined for thousands of customers. "Gathering ingredients is one of the best jobs," she says.

The cream ices (an old-fashioned name for ice cream) contain a high proportion of fruit – the Gooseberry & Elderflower has 37 per cent – as much as eight times that of some conventional frozen desserts. "They are a cross between an ice cream and a sorbet," Stephany explains. Inside the farm shop, run by her sister Eleanor Sheldrake and brother-in-law Barry,

Stephany looks at the rapidly emptying freezer with pride. "People come specifically to buy the ices," Eleanor says. Hannah Taylor, from Stowmarket, has visited with her two little boys, Daniel and William: "We recommend them to everyone – they have such a fresh taste." Little wonder, considering they are made next door with fruit and flowers picked less than 100 metres away.

### A RICH HERITAGE

Stephany's enterprise is not a new venture, however, but part of a three-generation family tradition. Her parents Nick and Joan moved to Alder Carr Farm on the outskirts of Needham Market, near where Nick grew up, in 1981 when she was four years old. At the time, Alder Carr (meaning wet woodland) was just a derelict pig farm; now, the family grows fruit and vegetables, from gooseberries and tayberries to broccoli and asparagus, as well as offering pick-your-own and refreshments in a café, too. The Hardinghams started producing fruit cream ices in 1987 when they had a glut of raspberries, inspired by Nick's mother Audrey, who first made them in the 1950s. "Her blackberry





and blackcurrant ones had a real zing to them,” Stephany says. “And a beautiful colour.”

### BACK TO HER ROOTS

They set up in the farmhouse, then moved operations to the tearoom before extending the shop building and buying equipment with a grant from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (now Defra) in 1996. The range was only part of the business, though: “We didn’t have the time to dedicate to the cream ices,” Joan says. “If Stephany hadn’t taken it over, we wouldn’t be producing them anymore.” Instead, the Hardings supply their daughter with the ingredients for her fruited confections.

The only change Stephany has made to her grandmother’s recipe is to reduce the amount of sugar: “But not by much or the cream ices would become too hard.” Her expert knowledge suggests she’s been doing this all her life but, despite growing up on the farm, Stephany chose a very different career path at first. After leaving university with a degree in environmental science, she assisted on conservation projects in Guatemala and Malaysia, ➔



"WE PRODUCE UP  
TO 14 FLAVOURS BUT  
GOOSEBERRY &  
ELDERFLOWER REMAINS  
THE BESTSELLER"



and worked in London for three years as an environmental consultant before returning to the farm in 2005. "I realised the importance of a sense of belonging," she says. "And I really wanted to make something and run my own ethical company rather than advising others."

### THE APPRENTICE

She spent two years with Nick in the kitchen before branching out on her own, and her partner Graham Sayell, who was already working on the farm as a woodsman, took over from Stephany's father in production. They now live in Needham Market, a five-minute bike ride away along a path beside the River Gipping. In 2007, Stephany set up Alder Tree as a separate enterprise. "The first thing I did was to change the labels and reduce the number of flavours to concentrate on the most popular ones," she says. There are now nine in the

individual tubs and up to 14, including limited editions, in the 500ml pots. The range has won 30 Great Taste awards for varieties such as Damson, Summer Fruits, Tayberry, Toffee Apple, Morello Cherry and Raspberry. "We were also finalists in BBC Radio Four's Food and Farming Awards in 2011," she says. "That was one of my proudest moments." The bestseller, however, remains Gooseberry & Elderflower.

In the kitchen, a vat of gooseberries, lemon, homemade elderflower cordial and sugar (made from East Anglian sugar beet) bubbles away, filling the air with a fragrant steam that floats out into the courtyard. "It's like a fruity sauna," Graham says. "The purée smells amazing, but is incredibly sticky if you spill any of it." The crop is picked by an army of students over spring and summer, as more than six tonnes (including a tonne of gooseberries gathered between June and August from the farm's 200







"A TONNE OF GOOSEBERRIES  
IS GATHERED BETWEEN JUNE AND  
AUGUST FROM 200 BUSHES"

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bushes) is needed each year to make the cream ices – over half of which comes from Alder Carr. The rest, such as apples and pears, is from other local growers, including Stephany's uncle's farm near Bury St Edmunds. It takes an hour to make and pot 50 litres of cream ice. The team produces 12 batches each day during the peak summer period but work continues throughout the year – the only time the business closes is between Christmas and New Year, and when Stephany and Graham take a one-week holiday in the autumn.

Despite the efforts to fulfil huge demand, the atmosphere is calm and jovial. Graham blends the purée with peaks of whipped cream, forming swirls of green until a smooth yellow mixture is created. "You can actually hear when it's happy and singing away to itself," he says. Once the batch is ready, full-time employee Greig Collins, and Lorna Allen, Sarah Nunn and Louise Petterson, who help on making days, pump the concoction into pink, maroon and cream tubs.

## SWEET SUCCESS

Since Stephany took over, sales have doubled: 20,000 500ml tubs and 45,000 125ml tubs are sold each year. "I drew up a business plan early on," she says. "It made me think about what I wanted to achieve and we have regular family meetings to ensure everything is a success. The hardest part is the financial side – I'm constantly learning." The company has grown organically and the only loan Stephany has taken out is one from her parents to convert an old ambulance into a cream-ice van – named Audrey, after her grandmother – which she takes to 40 events a year, including weddings and festivals.

Even with such a busy schedule, Stephany always has time to experiment with new flavours, and a home-delivery service is in the pipeline, too. "It's wonderful to meet people who enjoy our desserts," she says. "Being the cream-ice lady is pretty cool." ■

**i Alder Tree** (01449 721220; [alder-tree.co.uk](http://alder-tree.co.uk)).

## Taking on a family business



Working with relatives can be both the best and the worst situation, and often at the same time. It makes sense to think about how to go ahead – here are some suggestions.

**SIT TOGETHER** and write down what you are all hoping to achieve: dealing with your parent, partner or offspring means good communication is more important, not less.

**TRY TO GET AN UNDERSTANDING** of what the current plans are and why, what has worked in the past and what hasn't. It is easy to lose a great deal of knowledge if the current owner (even if it is a family member) is leaving. Make sure they accept that you'll be in charge and there will be change: you're likely to need to improve some of the ways in which things are done. This is much easier if you start as you mean to go on.

**BE AWARE OF THE DIFFICULTIES** experienced by family members leaving the company: many find it hard to let someone take over. Deal with it sensitively, but firmly.

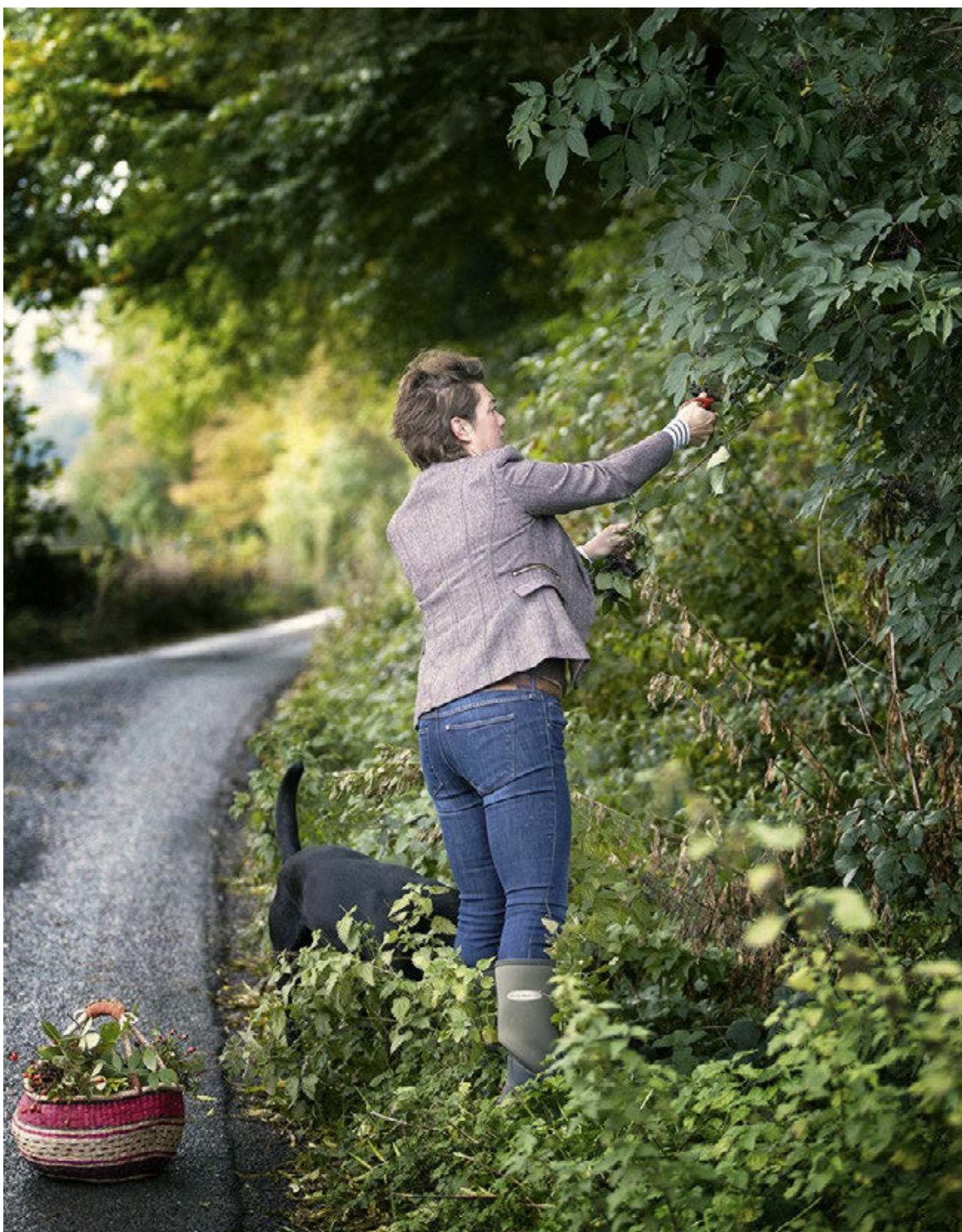


FOOD & DRINK

# A PASSION FOR PRESERVES

A new life in the Yorkshire Dales inspired one woman to harvest fruit from hedgerows and create a business selling a unique range of stylishly packaged jams

WORDS BY RACHAEL OAKDEN ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRENT DARBY



Vicky Smith never goes fruit picking alone. As she rummages for the fattest blackberries hidden in the hedges along a deserted lane in Bishopdale, North Yorkshire, her handsome canine companion Joe licks his grey-bearded lips in appreciation of all the ripe autumn smells in the air. Later, he will relax in the boot room while Vicky boils a batch of bramble jelly in a copper pan on the stove in her kitchen. Joe doesn't have a particularly sweet tooth, but this black Labrador is the reason why Vicky, a downshifting interior designer, is making jam for a living. "When we moved here from London, I promised my daughter Olivia she could have a dog," Vicky says. "I started walking him along lanes and in the fields, and I noticed all the fruit growing in the hedgerows."

## ESCAPE TO THE COUNTRY

Foraging and heading back to cook in her country kitchen is not the existence she had in mind when she relocated to the Yorkshire Dales in 2007. Vicky and her husband Alex didn't want Olivia, now nine, to grow up under a flight path, so when her parents offered



them a low rent on a Wensleydale cottage inherited from a great-aunt, they accepted. Their vision of a better work-life balance in the heart of a National Park initially eluded them, however, and the freelance design jobs that Vicky had hoped for were thin on the ground. At that time, the isolation of the 17th-century hillside cottage only made the situation worse: "I was tempted to go back to London, but I had a dogged determination to make it work."

## THE LEARNING CURVE

That was when Joe joined the family, inadvertently prompting Vicky to take a new direction. On their long daily walks, she saw lots of elderberries, sloes and brambles growing bright in the hedges. Come autumn, Vicky started to harvest them. "I made chutneys, crumbles and pies, but I discovered that jam was what I enjoyed most." Before long, she was selling jars at the WI market in Leyburn, where customers were complimentary about her innovative varieties. A self-taught cook, Vicky became interested in balancing flavours and experimented with seasonal combinations: carrot and rhubarb; pumpkin, orange and ginger; raspberry and wild mint. "Jams can often look old-fashioned," Vicky says, "but I wanted to create something that could have come from The Conran Shop." She settled on shallow French pâté jars with screw-top lids and hand-written labels. At the same time, she had the idea for Jamsmith, a subscription-based club whose members receive two pots of jam per month.

"I didn't want to stand behind a stall at a farmers' market for hours every Saturday," Vicky says. "Because jam is everywhere, though, I knew I had to do it differently." In addition to her unusual flavours, Vicky decided to provide her customers with an exclusive product: "All of my soft-set jellies and butters contain twice as much fruit as mass-produced preserves, and I vary the

flavours by season," she says. "I also chop the ingredients by hand, macerate the fruit in Fairtrade sugar overnight to draw out the flavours and natural sweetness, then boil it in small quantities." The process can take up to three days and can't be interrupted: "If you don't keep a constant eye on the pot, the jam can go really wrong. I even turn off the radio so I am focused."

A limited budget forced Vicky to build the business gradually: early on, a blog provided a free alternative to a website, and she relied on recommendations for marketing. Fortunately, the bulk of the ingredients were free: "Neighbours became aware of what I was doing and I started to receive donations from their gluts. I often find bags of fruit on my doorstep," she says. As demand for Vicky's jam grew, she decided to create a waiting list so she didn't have to compromise on quality – or family time: "Last year, I was posting boxes of jam from King's Cross station before we got on the Eurostar to go on holiday. Now I like to have all my work done before Olivia gets home from school."

Since its launch, Jamsmith has a growing list of individual and corporate customers. The innovative subscription model means that Vicky knows exactly what she needs to produce and how much she will earn (subscribers pay £10 per month, which covers the





## THE PRESERVES MARKET IS VERY SATURATED, SO YOU NEED A POINT OF DIFFERENCE

making and delivery costs). One of the biggest factors in the business's growth has been Vicky's personality, reflected in her popular blog ([jamsmith.tumblr.com](http://jamsmith.tumblr.com)), which has attracted many customers. "I write about fruit, dog walks and my life – jam only accounts for about ten per cent of it. So when people buy my preserves, I like to think they're buying a little piece of my lifestyle, too." ■

**1** *Jamsmith (07958 729516; [jamsmith.co.uk](http://jamsmith.co.uk)). Since this article was first published, Vicky has moved to Ambleside in Cumbria, where she continues to run her business.*



## My path to success

### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Working by myself. Being away from an office can be lonely, but Twitter provides me with humour and banter, while also being a great way to interact with other self-employed rural businesswomen and boost my custom.



### DID YOU RECEIVE ANY SPECIFIC TRAINING?

I went on as many free Business Link courses as I could to learn about relevant topics that included public relations, accountancy and the benefits of social media – it was by doing these that I got inspiration to blog and use resources such as Twitter and Springwise, a weekly online digest of global business trends and ideas.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU'D KNOWN BEFORE STARTING?

There are so many labelling laws to comply with that creating my packaging and staying on top of the paperwork takes up as much of my time as the actual making. The fruit and sugar contents determine whether I can class my product as jam, extra

jam or a jelly, so I have had to keep that in mind. I learnt a lot about it all from the WI.

### WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT WORKING FOR YOURSELF?

I needed a job that would fit in around Olivia, and it now works really well. My next step is to find an assistant to help me keep up with demand.

### DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR OTHERS?

Think about what you enjoy making the most – I could never sell chutney because, for me, there's nothing worse than chopping onions and standing over pans of boiling vinegar all day, whereas others might love it. The preserves market is also very saturated, so you need a point of difference.



# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

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## *food producer*

### CREATING THE PRODUCT

**WHAT TO MAKE** Focusing on one food type or one well-defined audience – the more niche, the better – will make it easier to market and promote the business, and attract customers back. You might decide to sell preserves like Vicky of Jamsmith, or brownies or cupcakes. With a focus on a specific product, you can quickly become an expert in that particular area.

**MARKET TESTING** Recruit tasters to give honest feedback on everything from flavour to packaging. To work out your price point, research similar companies online: what are they charging? How are they promoting themselves? What can you learn from their standards of customer service?

**REGULATIONS** Before selling to the public, ensure your kitchen is certified for health and hygiene purposes – environmental health officers at your local council will do an inspection. They will also offer advice on handling food allergies and how to label packaging to reflect the contents. Find registration advice from the government's Food

Standards Agency ([food.gov.uk](http://food.gov.uk)), and get insurance to cover you, the business and your customers. Next, notify Companies House if you are registering a limited company, and HM Revenue and Customs. Also, make the most of a free consultation with an accountant through the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (for details, go to [find.icaew.com/pages/bas](http://find.icaew.com/pages/bas)).

### MAKING SALES

**ROUTE TO MARKET** Sell in person at farmers' markets and food shows, and consider hosting a Pop-up shop or event with Pop-up Britain ([popupbritain.com](http://popupbritain.com)) – these routes offer a great opportunity to get immediate customer response. If you would prefer to have an online presence, try platforms such as Etsy, and local



equivalents, which attract traffic on your behalf. Create your own website by investing in a template from Weebly or Wix, or turn your blog into a store with an e-commerce plug-in. As the business grows, think about pitching your products to independents, supermarkets and larger retailers.

**RAISING YOUR PROFILE** Contact the journalists and bloggers who cover your industry and reach out to the customers you're looking to attract, and follow them on Twitter. Send press releases to local and national newspapers

and magazines with quotes and a high-quality picture of you and your range of products, and agree to speak at events – or host your own.

### GROWING THE BUSINESS


#### PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Continue to work on your packaging, the provenance of ingredients and price point, as this will pay dividends in the form of increased sales.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE** React quickly to any complaints, and encourage people to make repeat purchases with special offers by sending out a newsletter and keeping website content fresh and up to date.

**SUPPORT** Join regional groups such as Taste North East ([tastenortheast.co.uk](http://tastenortheast.co.uk)) and Heart of England Fine Foods ([heff.co.uk](http://heff.co.uk)), as they provide a network, as well as opportunities for partnerships. There are also dedicated resources for food businesses: try Relish Marketing ([relish-marketing.co.uk](http://relish-marketing.co.uk)), Monique Borst's food bootcamps ([moniqueborst.com](http://moniqueborst.com)) and StartUp Britain's annual StartUp Food event ([startupbritain.co](http://startupbritain.co)).





FOOD & DRINK

# FLAVOURS OF NATURE

A move to Scotland and a passion for gardening inspired one woman to quit the corporate life and produce her own range of herbal vinegars and sparkling jellies

WORDS BY KATE LANGRISH ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY CRISTIAN BARNETT





Seeing her sitting quietly in a converted stable in the garden of her Edwardian house, applying labels to neat rows of bottled herb and fruit vinegars, you can catch a glimpse of the 'old' Penny Turnbull; the one whose unflappable nature meant she could bring calm and order to even the most chaotic situations during her career in international crisis management. So, for someone whose job was all about preparing for the unexpected, it's surprising to hear that the creation of Penny's artisan food business, The Little Herb Farm, was, well, unplanned.

"Ten years ago, my husband Michael and I were living in the US," Penny says. "My job for a global hotel company meant I was responsible for preparing for scenarios such as earthquakes, hurricanes and technical failures. It was rewarding but also very stressful. Out of the blue, Michael brought up the idea of moving to the UK – he wanted our daughter Liv to grow up there." After just five weeks, Michael had a teaching post at the University of St Andrews in Fife and, while visiting for interviews, found a house in nearby Pittenweem. "I've always been a risk-averse person," Penny says, "but we moved two weeks before Christmas with a baby and three cats. I'd only been to Scotland once before!"

The daughter of a military man, Penny moved around England while







books I picked up at car boot sales or in charity shops,” she explains. The range of vinegars, which can be used in salad dressings, cooking and cocktails, grew and within a year they were being stocked in local delis and farm shops, as well as at farmers’ markets and food fairs that Penny attended in Scotland.

## A HOME-GROWN AFFAIR

At the back of her three-quarter-acre plot, behind the hen house, are the herb beds: neat rows of lovage, fennel, chives, mint, six varieties of thyme (lemon, orange, broadleaf, creeping, Azores and caraway-scented), lavender and rosemary. Calendulas have self-seeded around the garden: “I came up with the Nasturtium vinegar when I discovered it around our compost.” A polytunnel protects plants from the blustery coastal weather (“It means we can grow chillies for the vinegars, too”), while an enormous greenhouse holds pots of organic herbs that Penny sells during open garden days. “We didn’t know it was going to be so big,” she says, “but it has given me space to expand.”

Back in the old stable block she shares with swallows in the hayloft above, Penny experiments with flavours at a wooden workbench. Huge bunches of lavender, rosemary and thyme hang drying from the rafters, while jars of meadowsweet and elderflower line the rustic shelves. Penny supplements homegrown berries with crops from nearby farms: “I started using imperfect soft fruit. Now, the growers phone me up and say, ‘I’ve got 50kg of raspberries – do you want them?’”

Today, she is working on seasonal combinations such as Gooseberry & Elderflower, and Raspberry, Mint & Chilli. Fresh fruit fills brewing buckets on the stone floor and the acidic smell of vinegar is softened by the scent of fresh herbs. “My products are made the old-fashioned way – by cold infusion,” Penny explains. “I steep the berries in white wine vinegar for a week and the



growing up, but her happiest childhood memories came from summers spent in her grandmother’s Wiltshire garden: “She instilled in me a passion for herbs.”

It wasn’t until a few years later, though, that another chance event resulted in the creation of Penny’s award-winning vinegars. “I had started to grow herbs organically,” she says. “Pittenweem has an annual arts festival and I had a glut of raspberries. Spurred on by the idea of taking a stall at the event, I found a recipe for raspberry vinegar and gave it a modern twist by adding my herbs. The result was Raspberry & Rosemary Vinegar – I sold out on the first day.”

Inspired by her success, Penny tried other pairings. “I researched recipes in





herbs for up to a month. The liquid takes on the flavours and colour, then I filter it overnight in straining bags.”

The fruit goes on the compost and the vinegar is transferred to the Aga. “It only boils for ten minutes, so none of the delicate taste is lost,” Penny says. The result is an array of beautifully coloured liquids – from the intense purple of Blackcurrant & Thyme to the warm gold of Nasturtium, which gives dressings and barbecue marinades a kick. She makes five-litre batches around five times a week to produce 250 bottles. Demand led Penny to extend her range in 2013 to include jellies such as Sage & Apple and Purple Basil. More recently, herb-flavoured salts and sugars have been added, too.

Although she now has a business plan (“I thought I should after two years!”), the ‘new’ Penny is still allowing The Little Herb Farm to develop organically: “Not having everything written in stone enables you to be open to ideas and opportunities. I’ve been on an amazing journey and loved every minute. I can’t think of anywhere I’d rather be than in my workshop or pottering around the garden.”

**i The Little Herb Farm**  
([thelittleherbfarm.co.uk](http://thelittleherbfarm.co.uk)).



“I RESEARCHED RECIPES FOR THE VINEGARS IN BOOKS I PICKED UP AT CAR BOOT SALES OR IN CHARITY SHOPS. MY PRODUCTS ARE MADE THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY”



## To plan or jump in?

Sometimes, starting a business just creeps up on you. You find yourself in a new place, jobs are scarce and you simply have an opportunity fall at your feet (an abundance of raspberries, in the case of Penny Turnbull). At that point, it is a case of jumping in wholeheartedly. Many entrepreneurs make a decision to do just that – like Penny, they write a business plan, but only once they have launched. You will, of course, need a vision and a goal; you have to know why you are doing it and what you want to achieve. Decide on what your business will look like, how many hours you can devote to it and the impact on other commitments. Then simply create a ‘roadmap’ comprising a set of directions and actions based on your goals – this is your business plan.



## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE #2:

# *Starting a part-time business*

### **IT IS POSSIBLE TO MANAGE YOUR START-UP AROUND OTHER COMMITMENTS OR PAID EMPLOYMENT.**

You will be joining the one in five adults who are defined as 'hidden entrepreneurs'. The most important factor when deciding to take this route is to be realistic about how much time you have to spare and understand how best to use it.

### **YOU WILL HAVE CONFLICTING DEMANDS, SO TRY TO PUT YOUR VARIOUS ROLES IN DIFFERENT COMPARTMENTS.**

Being a small business owner is hard enough when you can devote all your time to it – doing it part-time is even tougher. Find a way to make sure that your family and friends understand that even though you might be at the kitchen table, you are still working; you might not exactly wear a different hat but some rules will help. A closed door helps those around you remember not to disturb you.

### **STRICT TIME MANAGEMENT IS ESSENTIAL.**

Keep a log of what you do in each of your roles for a few days to build up an accurate picture of your activities, and give each (large and small) a low-, medium- or high-priority value. If less-urgent tasks are taking up too much of your time, ask yourself why. Perhaps you are procrastinating and preventing yourself from starting the most important ones. Try shaving time from medium- and low-priority activities by either delegating or doing them all in one go at the start or end of the day. Stop faffing and just get on with the

jobs you have been putting off – imagine how great you will feel when you tick the principal ones off the list. For a free trial of activity log software, visit [liquidplanner.com](http://liquidplanner.com).

### **MINIMISING THE NUMBER OF TIMES YOU SWITCH BETWEEN TYPES OF TASK WILL SAVE TIME.**

Highly efficient people batch similar tasks together; switching between activities takes time – your brain needs to re-calibrate as you think afresh about each different kind. For example, work through your emails together, then process all your orders in one go rather than as they come in.

### **WORK OUT JUST HOW MUCH TIME YOU WILL HAVE TO SPEND ON YOUR NEW ENTERPRISE AND BUILD YOUR BUSINESS AROUND IT.**

Don't over-produce or over-commit in the vague hope that you will suddenly find some spare hours – that is the one thing that definitely won't happen. When we feel time restrictions, it is hard to work effectively. Instead, we rush and make mistakes. Allocate a slot and stick to it. Ensure customers know the time frame for delivery and don't be afraid to turn orders or clients away.

### **TAKE STOCK OF WHAT YOU CAN DO AND FOCUS ON THOSE SKILLS.**

You are not perfect and you can't or don't have time to do everything. Too often we think that we should write the copy for our website or do our tax return. But learning those skills requires time and energy, and, more importantly, takes you away from the things that you are good at. Do what you can comfortably, then outsource

*T* **HINK ABOUT WHEN YOUR ENERGY IS AT ITS HIGHEST LEVEL – THIS WILL BE YOUR OPTIMUM OR PEAK WORK TIME.**

*Schedule your most challenging duties for these times of day; you will work more effectively, be more creative and, ultimately, they should take you less time to do. When you have least energy, use the time to do the mindless chores such as stuffing envelopes.*





**USE TECHNOLOGY TO HELP YOU.** Invest in superfast Broadband if possible. It is no longer expensive or complicated to use other tools; cloud computing, social media and mobile devices mean you can be in business anywhere. But don't be managed by them either. You could also find a virtual assistant, web designer or social media expert who will subcontract the work based on your requirements – see [aukva.com](http://aukva.com).

the rest to people you trust and like – and don't feel guilty about it.

#### **SOCIAL MEDIA IS AN EXCELLENT WAY TO PROMOTE YOUR BUSINESS AT VERY LOW COST,**

but it can be both a chore and time-consuming. Be strategic about the platform that you choose and make sure that is where you can connect with your potential market. You may love Pinterest but how many of your customers are on there? It can seem a sensible use of time to tweet or post in a spare moment but consider using a social media manager such as [hootsuite.com](http://hootsuite.com) or

[bufferapp.com](http://bufferapp.com) to schedule a week's worth in one go.

#### **DON'T TIE YOURSELF TO A DESK**

– take advantage of cloud technologies to store data effectively; these include Evernote, Dropbox and Google Docs. This means you can work anywhere. Think about switching your financial accounts to an online cloud-based system such as [xero.com](http://xero.com), but speak to your accountant first and use the same one as them. If you update accounts regularly and synchronise them with your accountant, you'll save hours when preparing your year-end accounts.

## TECHNICAL TIPS AND TOOLS

Low-cost technology tools make it easy to get support if you need it: **WORDPRESS.COM** lets you set up your own website in a very short time – managing your own content and minor changes won't tie you to a single web company.

**SHOPIFY.COM** – start selling and taking online payments with little fuss.

**MAILCHIMP.COM** allows you to create e-newsletters that synchronise with social media and client database.

## WORKING FROM HOME

Prepare a dedicated work space. Be prepared to out-grow your kitchen table fairly quickly. Try to minimise your office equipment; if everything can be packed into a box, you can take your work with you as the volume increases. If you really need your own space, a renovated shed or caravan would work. A garden room or pod is perfect, although expensive.

Turn everything off for at least half an hour each day. All businesses need thinking time to create and refresh, and they are better for it.

Try not to become stressed about things you can't control; if it rains at the farmers' market, fewer customers means you could catch up on a blog.

Don't be afraid to say no more often, to your family and even to customers. It is better to offer a quality service or product than compromise that by increasing quantity.

*People who are employed with PAYE wages but earn extra money from other activities should find out more about second incomes by visiting [gov.uk](http://gov.uk).*



# Craft or create

Have a flair for stitching, knitting or designing? Discover ways to earn a living from your individual talent







MAKING

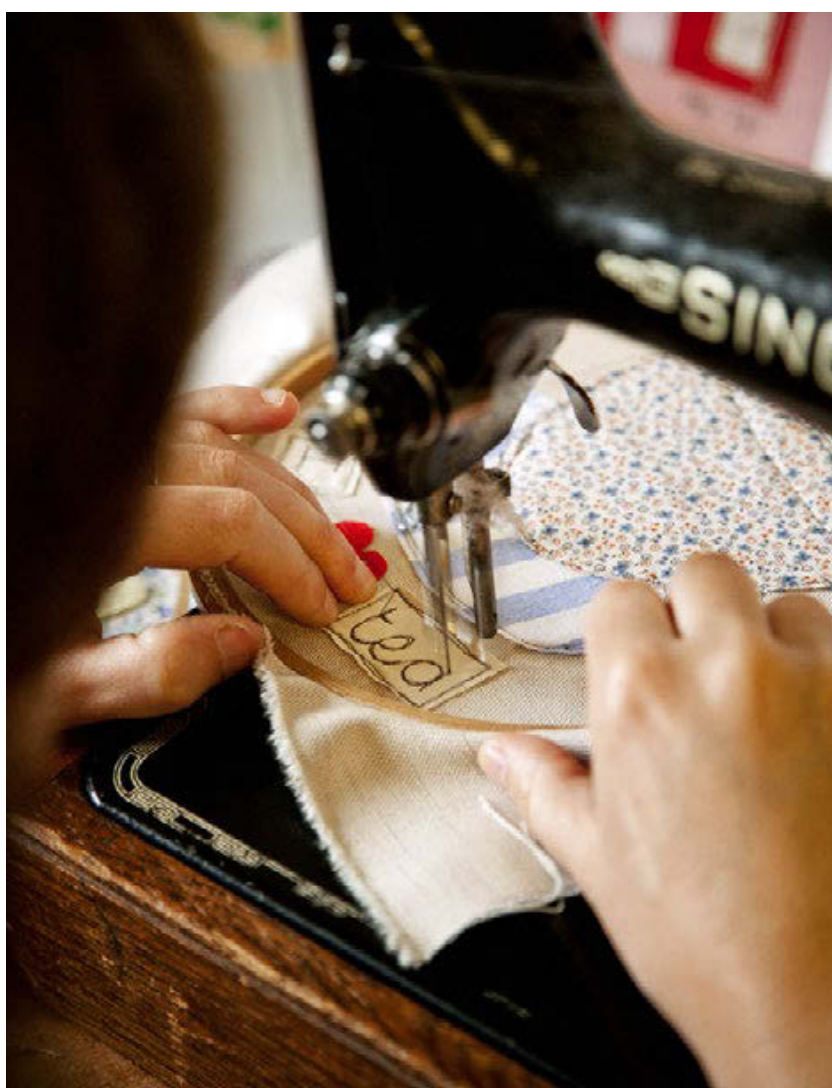
# STITCHES TO TREASURE

Based in her native Cornwall, Poppy Treffry and her team create a homespun, hand-sewn range of accessories with embroidered images inspired by their surroundings

WORDS BY **LISA BUCKLAND** ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY **LAURA EDWARDS**







Poppy Treffry is busy at an old sewing machine that purrs in the corner of her workshop like a vintage Rolls-Royce. Hanging on the walls are samples of her embroidered and appliqué bags and postcards. Behind are roll on roll of fabric and piles of neatly folded cottons and cords patterned with stripes, dots and dainty florals. On a cutting table in the centre of the room is a stack of semi-circles in stripy blue ticking, ready to be sewn into tea cosies.

Poppy crafts her unique accessories, bags and cushions on a second-hand 1930s Singer given to her by her grandfather. Its simple set-up suits the style of freehand embroidery that has become her trademark. "It's so straightforward," she says. "It's basically a bobbin, tension dial and needle."

Perching at the machine to demonstrate, Poppy clasps a piece of duck-egg-blue fabric between two circular wooden hoops. Placing the fabric beneath the needle, she lightly touches her foot on the pedal and the needle darts up and down through the fabric. Manoeuvring the hoop, she deftly 'writes' her name in looping black-thread letters. Pausing to position an appliqué disc of spotted red, she stitches twice round the outside: the beginnings of a ➡



classic Poppy Treffry textile. Homely and light-hearted, her tea cosies are embroidered with slogans such as 'Make tea not war' and are designed to be used. Tea cosies are her accidental bestseller as she made her first only because her father asked her to. Teacups, dogs and fairy cakes are regular motifs, along with appliqué images of fishing boats strung with orange buoys and St Ives rooftops.

### HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

In 2003, Poppy returned to Bodmin after volunteering at a handicraft cooperative in Central America; she was broke and wondering how she could make a living from a Fashion and Textiles degree from Winchester School of Art. She had tried her hand at making embroidered bags before she left, but had been too timid to sell them. She set to work again, this time in a small bedroom at her father's house, using an old door placed on the bed as a cutting table.

A friend gave Poppy a place to stay and, spotting the potential in her bags, took samples to galleries in nearby Marazion. She sold 20 at the first try. An eagle-eyed crafts development officer from the council saw one on sale and got in touch. "She told me what to do – find premises, write a business plan and apply for funding. If it wasn't for her, there wouldn't be a business."

Within the week, Poppy had found an attic space in Newlyn above a fish-packing warehouse: "To get to work, I had to step over crates of fish, climb up a ladder and through a trap door!" Subsidising the business with a part-time job as an arts officer and a £1,000 loan from The Prince's Trust, Poppy began making bags and kitchenware. Stands at the Harrogate Trade Fair and London's Top Drawer followed; in less than two years, orders had increased so much that it was time to expand.

Poppy's beautiful surroundings continue to inspire her textiles: born







## Being creative in business

Artistic people can struggle with the business side; it often takes second place to making a beautiful item. But it's your enterprise, so you can run it your way. Extending your creativity to the business model, as Poppy Treffry has, makes it less of a chore and ensures your ethics and ethos are woven throughout.

Take expert advice in the early stages, even if it feels

counter-creative. Surround yourself with people you can trust, who you're able to work with and have complementary skills to yours. Be prepared to give up some control and allow your team to show their strengths. Seek inspiration in your environment and personality; it enriches the story, which is a great marketing tool when moving into new markets.



to an artisan-builder father and a mother who spun and dyed her own yarns, Poppy grew up in Bodmin on a self-sufficient farm and was taught to knit by the age of four. She sources her fabrics locally and seeks out second-hand material from car-boot fairs and attic sales, which she turns into a 100 per cent recycled range designed for the Eden Project. She keeps her favourite vintage finds in a sunshine-yellow Havana cigar box: remnants of a silk scarf that belonged to her grandmother, labels and 'selvedge': the self-finished edges of fabric.

She now supplies more than 200 shops in the UK and Japan, including Anthropologie and Fortnum & Mason, and employs seven people and four outworkers. In November 2010, she opened her first shop in St Ives. She painted it in "fish-and-chip-shop colours" of ruby-red and duck-egg blue and furnished it with an old haberdashery bench: "I am proof that you can make a living at the end of the earth!"

**i** Poppy Treffry (01736 795494; [poppytreffry.co.uk](http://poppytreffry.co.uk)).



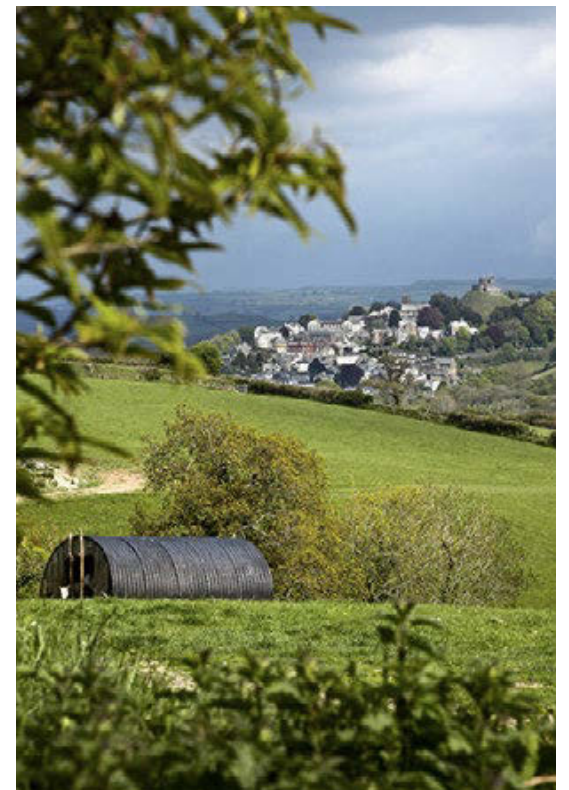


MAKING

# FABRIC OF LIFE

Jo Colwill has pieced together a scheme to bolster income from her dairy herd – craft classes that celebrate the skill of quilt-making with the chance to produce a handmade heirloom of your own

WORDS BY CAROLINE REES ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER



One of Jo Colwill's most ambitious picture quilts depicts her and her husband Stephen dreaming of what they would miss about their rural lifestyle if they were forced to give up farming. Amid the landscape of hills, a cow peers over the gate, while a horse and cart passes by and Jo tends her garden. Employing a mixture of quilting, appliqué and stitching techniques, it is an exquisite example of modern folk art.

"Everyday things inspire me," Jo says. "Houses, gardens, flowers, the moors, old farm machinery. I take my dogs out and when I see cobwebs on the grass or the moon through the trees, I can't get home quickly enough to start sewing."

Jo and Stephen live on a 120-acre organic dairy farm near Launceston in Cornwall. From here, Jo runs Cowslip Workshops, which offers craft classes, attracting textile lovers from home and abroad. She has been quilting for 35 years but it wasn't until 1996 that Cowslip graduated from casual gatherings around her dining table to a full-time business. "It started with one class and got busier through word of mouth," Jo recalls. Like many ➔











## AT COWSLIP'S LIVELY SEWING GROUP, IT'S THE SWAPPING OF IDEAS AND CAMARADERIE THAT APPEALS THE MOST

farmers after the foot-and-mouth crisis of 2001, the couple diversified, adding a shop and a café.

It's an exciting enterprise to find down a farm track. There's a maze of outbuildings, little passageways and garden 'rooms', all surrounded by inspirational countryside. From the gazebo in the vegetable garden, there is a perfect view of Launceston, with its castle outlined on the horizon. The lofty timber-framed workroom is home to quilts, fabrics, pattern books and sewing paraphernalia, while the shop is a stitcher's paradise of trimmings, yarns, buttons, fabric and handmade creations. The café, opened eight years ago, is a tranquil communal meeting place serving produce from the farm.

### CRAFT REVIVAL

Although there is a long folk-art tradition of quilt-making around the world, it is often associated with groups of Victorian women salvaging scraps of material to make do and mend. But Jo has noticed a resurgence of interest: "People come to escape from day-to-day life, but they are also looking for a more productive use of their free time. Something made personally means so much more than anything you can buy, and recycling is an important element of it now."

At Cowslip's sewing group, there is agreement that it's the camaraderie and swapping of ideas that appeals most, particularly in rural areas where you can feel isolated. Maggie Colwill (no relation), one of Jo's quilters, enjoys the stimulation of sewing together. "It's all the little extras people suggest that make the quilt more interesting. Hours of love and thought have gone into it and you cherish it as an heirloom at the end. But it's about friendship, too. We chat

about family and put the world to rights. We always go home with a warm glow."

With all the time involved in crafting a quilt, the finished article becomes a personal statement. In Jo's big farm design for example, the cartoonish quality draws you in, though her worries about the future of the countryside are illustrated with a question mark and a tumble of menacing colours representing weeds. "You put your life and soul into it," Jo says. "People speak through their quilts in a way."

Jo, who grew up locally, had two loves as a child: horses and sewing. "I practically lived at the riding stables," she says. "But I also loved fabric and made my own dolls' clothes." She went on to teach riding – she still keeps three horses – but turned her attention to quilt-making when she married and moved into the 400-year-old Newhouse Farm, where her husband's family have been tenants since 1907. "It needed a homely touch," Jo explains. "Farmers never want to ➔





spend anything on a house – they’ll buy a new tractor but not new curtains, so I made my own. And we needed something cheerful for our bedroom. So I made my first patchwork quilt, just cut-out diamonds of dressmaking fabric stitched over paper. I’m rather horrified at it now.”

### NEEDLEWORK KNOW-HOW

She persevered and honed her skills by attending classes and meeting other quilters. Her second effort, a sampler quilt, was borrowed for a magazine shoot by the local home-interiors shop and was snapped up by a customer. Instead of selling it, though, Jo swapped it for a bed. She hasn’t looked back.

Workshops, taught by her and guest tutors, range from Basic Appliqué to Stitching an Autumn Landscape. “I love meeting people and you learn as much as you give,” Jo says. She doesn’t impose pure quilting on beginners: instead of turning every edge under, she suggests adhesive and a decorative stitch to save time: “There is nothing right or wrong in

quilting. My aim is that people go home with something they have made in a day. One lady has been to so many sessions, she’s made about 200 cushions!”

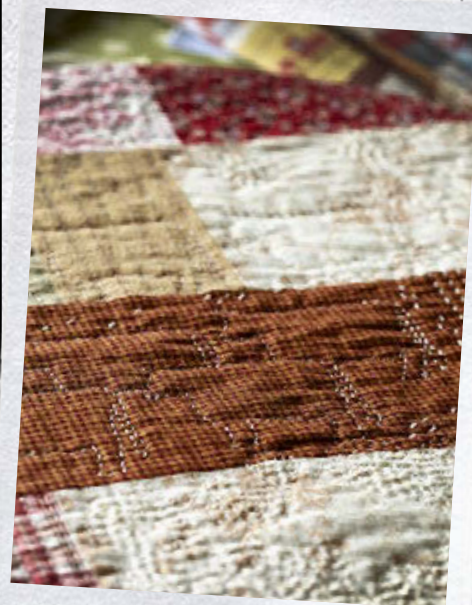
The bulk of Jo’s creations are class samples, which then sell in the shop. “I do little sketches, then a big drawing to create templates,” she says. “I just make it up as I go along. I’ve got a stash of fabric – I find colour and texture exciting and use a machine to piece bits together, then do the intricate parts by hand. While I’m working on one quilt, ten more are queuing up in my brain.”

Designs that Jo can’t bear to part with are displayed in the farmhouse, including a Baltimore block quilt that details her family history. “Some people want to be textile ‘artists’ but I do it because I love it,” she says. “You can’t make money out of quilts because of the time involved, it’s hard to charge even £5 an hour. I did a wholecloth quilt for a house nearby, taking designs from their lovely old bed. It took 990 hours.”

Jo now employs 15 staff but mucks in with most tasks. As well as the stitching and teaching, she stocks the shop and helps out at lambing time. Late at night is when she finally gets the chance to be alone with her sewing: “I go into the workroom, the dogs settle under the table and I just stitch away.” Cowslip’s success bolsters the income from the farm, but it has made inroads into family life, so Jo is keen to involve her husband. Hosting events, such as wassailing evenings and apple days, helps to do that. And the farm location and animals – cows and sheep – add interest for class attendees. “People enjoy seeing the livestock,” Jo says. “We love our life here. The farm and the workshops support each other. One without the other just wouldn’t be the same.”

 **Cowslip Workshops (01566 772654; [cowslipworkshops.co.uk](http://cowslipworkshops.co.uk)).**

## Branching out



Around half of all farmers are making use of their facilities in some way other than agriculture. When formulating a strategy, you will need to consider the existing business and develop your new ideas around it, especially if the farm continues to be the major income stream. There is support for farm enterprises – see [gov.uk/diversifying-farming-businesses](http://gov.uk/diversifying-farming-businesses) – or your existing farm advisor may be able to help.

If you are operating on the farm, you are likely to need planning permission for change of use and there will certainly be funding options available. Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) is a scheme that aims to support rural areas. One of its key aims is to increase capacity for employment and diversification in the rural economy, and it would be sensible to keep checking for updates at [gov.uk](http://gov.uk).









MAKING

# PATTERNS & PINS

Merchant & Mills' beautifully packaged dressmaking kits will encourage even the most inexperienced sewer to reach for a needle and thread

WORDS BY CAROLINE ATKINS • PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURA EDWARDS



There's something about the Merchant & Mills collection of sewing essentials that makes even the rustiest seamstress want to break open a box of pins and run up a few new outfits. From the thick card dress patterns (more like parchment than the usual fine paper), cut to size and supplied neatly rolled in their own stout storage tube, to the covetable packets of needles, mother-of-pearl buttons and glass-headed pins, the range Carolyn Denham and her partner Roderick Field have created from their studio in the Herefordshire village of Staunton-on-Wye captures all the satisfaction of a forgotten skill.

Inside the low-ceilinged room, Carolyn is working on a mink-coloured dress worn by a tailor's dummy. An old cash register holds stationery and labels, and the big cutting table summons up the spirit of a traditional draper's store. "I've been making my own clothes since my mother – an accomplished seamstress from the war generation – taught me how when I was eight," she says. By the time Carolyn was 13, she was making outfits for her three sisters and schoolfriends. A fashion degree at what is now the









## MAKING



FOR THE FIRST YEAR, CAROLYN KEPT HER INTERIOR DESIGN BUSINESS JOB, GOING PART-TIME WHILE SHE DID RESEARCH

University of Northumbria completed her training: “I soon learned that the clothing business is mostly about designing and selling – you may not see a piece of fabric all day long.” And it was making she loved, not marketing. So after stints in New York and Italy, it was through working in interior design that she had enough knowledge to set up on her own and rekindle her first love – clothes.

“I realised that, most of all, I wanted to pass on my passion for dressmaking,” Carolyn says, “and show people the sense of satisfaction it can give them.” She launched Merchant & Mills with just five dress designs – and the patterns to create them – at the 2010 Hay Festival. The garments themselves – stylish, easy shapes with distinctive lines and a wearable feel – were there on a rail to try on, from the simplest square-necked shift style to her bestseller (the one she wears most), the loose, swingy-hemmed Trapeze dress. “I went with two patterns in each size, and took orders for at least another 100.” She now has a collection of nine paper patterns and has even finished a guide to her craft – *Merchant & Mills Sewing Book*.

## TAKING THE PLUNGE

Despite her initial success, Carolyn admits it had been a real risk. She started off without knowing whether people would want to make their own clothes, relying on her instinct rather than market research. And she had invested all her savings – selling her London flat and giving up regular shop hours for the uncertainty of a new business. For the first year she kept her interior design job, going part-time while she researched her suppliers and planned her range of patterns. “I had grown to love this part of Herefordshire on visits to my sister who lives here, so I rented the house next door to her and commuted back to London three days a week.”

It was respect for old-fashioned industry that inspired the packaging, ➔









CAROLYN BUYS AS MANY OF HER  
MATERIALS AS POSSIBLE FROM THE UK





which features an appealing mixture of elegant script and more utilitarian block-capital lettering and was designed for the range by Roderick, a photographer. And her mother's sewing box was the starting point for the Merchant & Mills collection of workbox supplies that ensures customers are equipped to tackle whichever project they choose. Called 'notions', borrowing an American term, they include a magnet for picking up dropped pins, easy-thread needles (plus little drums of beeswax to make threading even quicker), tailor's chalk and bamboo point-turners for neatening off corners.

Carolyn buys as many of her materials as possible from the UK: the ten-inch dressmaking shears that can be endlessly resharpened are from Sheffield and will last a lifetime, and all the oilskin is from a Yorkshire mill. When the country's last thimble-making factory closed down, she

## Selling kits

The days when every high street had a shop selling pins, needles and fabrics are long gone, but the resurgence of crafting means there is a market for these items. And, despite an appetite for hobbies such as sewing, many people lack basic skills. You can take advantage of this by packaging a selection of kit that includes materials and instructions so customers can create their own items.

Test out kits on friends and family, and set up an online community, encouraging customers to display their work. You'll be amazed how effective word-of-mouth marketing can be. It's a good way to build customer loyalty, as well as finding out about your audience. For a great example, see [jollyred.co.uk](http://jollyred.co.uk).

bought the remaining stock of 10,000. The notions have already found their way into Liberty and the V&A shop.

What Carolyn never loses sight of is that her customers don't want to waste time and money making mistakes. So she invests her own energy in creating designs that are distinctively cut but not too challenging for a novice: "I think very carefully about the construction, so that there's nowhere they'll go wrong." The next step is to supply the fabrics, too. "Including the cloth will give people real confidence – they'll know it will work for the pattern they choose."

## THE PERFECT FIT

Having juggled two careers side by side for a year, Carolyn is now focused solely on Merchant & Mills, keeping a balance between designing and making. She's learned from experience how much she can do herself and how much to farm out. "Originally, Roderick and I thought we could produce the patterns from start to finish here, but we realised it would take up much of our day, so now we design them and they're printed elsewhere."

Carolyn sketches out new ideas in her Merchant & Mills maker's journal, a beautiful heavyweight notebook with pages folded concertina-wise. "Inspiration comes from seeing something that works," she says. "It might be what a local farmer is wearing in the village or – like my Top 64 pattern – based on the fisherman's smock worn by a customer I once met." And most of all, it's about the process of making. "Clothes come and go," Carolyn says, "but the tools of the sewing room remain the same." ≡

**i** *Merchant & Mills (01981 500692; [merchantandmills.com](http://merchantandmills.com)). Since this article was first published, Carolyn has since relocated to Rye in East Sussex, where she continues to run her business.*





MAKING

# AT HOME WITH DESIGN

Creating a fictional character inspired illustrator Mary Kilvert to produce a colourful collection of decorative pieces for the home, from beautiful textiles to quirky accessories

WORDS BY EMMA PRITCHARD ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLAIRE RICHARDSON



At the top of a cobbled street in the artisan area of Frome in Somerset, a flock of ovine characters peers out of the windows of an inviting emporium. It's apt that homeware designer Mary Kilvert, whose textiles, ceramics and accessories feature sheep and their fleeces, chose the premises of a former wool carder's to set up shop in this market town.

"When I first visited Frome, I knew it was the perfect match for my business," says Mary, who for eight years sketched her designs in London, beginning at the kitchen table of her one-bedroom flat, until she moved here in March 2013. "It has a real rural charm but is vibrant and creative." Having grown up in Weobley, Herefordshire, Mary took the chance to bring her company closer to her roots: "I'm a country girl at heart and my work is themed around animals. Walking along the river or in the hills, surrounded by nature, provides a huge source of inspiration. I never leave home without a camera or notebook."

Her distinctive line drawings come alive through her collection: a black cat chases a butterfly across a mug, dogs smile from jotting pads, and woodland ➞







TRANSFERRING HER  
SKETCHES TO  
CHINA AND FABRIC  
PROVED HARDER THAN  
MARY THOUGHT – IT  
TOOK ALMOST A YEAR  
BEFORE SHE WAS  
HAPPY WITH SAMPLES

animals gather within picture frames. It's hard to believe that what is now a profitable source of income started as a hobby in between commissions for magazines around the world: "I studied illustration at Kingston University and was drawing everything from tourist attractions to flowers. In my spare time, though, I'd let my imagination run free, creating pictures based on fairy tales, pets and, eventually, sheep."

Mary began selling her illustrations at craft fairs and markets in London, adding cards and felted bird brooches. Positive feedback from customers gave her the confidence to approach outlets such as the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow and the next step was a website, made with technical help from her husband, Simon. In 2008, Mary

relocated to a studio in Clapham before being awarded a spot at the prestigious Cockpit Arts in Holborn. "Our living room was overflowing with prints – I needed my own space," she recalls.

### ANIMAL MAGIC

Around the same time, Mary had the idea for the character that would inspire her to move from illustration to designing homeware. "I'd created a print called Colourful Sheep, based on a ram named Baartholomew, who knitted a jumper to wear so he would look different from his friends – only for them to copy him and knit their own pullovers, too. I thought it would look good on a mug or cushion cover, so contacted ceramics factories in Stoke-on-Trent and small textile printers around the UK." Transferring a sketch to china or fabric proved harder than Mary realised and it took almost a year before she was happy with the samples. "Each piece contains many different colours, so it was labour-intensive to get them right but I'm glad I made the effort," she explains. "Seeing the finished product was really exciting. I then had an urge to bring the characters to life in 3D, so I tried needle-felting one and knitting it a jersey. It took around eight hours – fortunately, I find working with wool very therapeutic!"

From one Baartholomew, seven others followed, each handmade from British wool: "Simon's parents had a flock of Lleyen sheep in Herefordshire and the farmer who now owns them cleans and combs their fleeces for me. I get the yarn for the jumpers from Aberdeenshire." The Colourful Sheep collection launched in November 2011, at the Country Living Christmas Fair, to an overwhelming response: "I'd emailed a newsletter and distributed fliers but never realised how popular it would be. I had to take orders because I sold out within the first day." Having spent months working into ➡









the night to catch up, needlefelting sheep or making bags, tea towels and cushion covers, and with requests continually coming in, Mary sought extra help. Today, now based in Frome, she employs a small team of local seamstresses during the busy periods, although she hand-finishes every item herself: "I'm fortunate to have space for a studio at home now, but in colder months nothing beats sitting in front of the woodburner to work."

Mary's designs may be stocked in 50 independents around the UK but she hasn't rested on her laurels. Queen Elizabeth, to mark the Jubilee, and British Bessie, for the Olympics, are two sheep that joined Baartholomew and the flock, and now she's planning to expand her range of ceramics and launch a collection based on her Cavalier King Charles spaniel, Bertie. Not bad for the business that started on the kitchen table of her small London flat. ☐

**i** *Mary Kilvert (01373 301724; [marykilvert.com](http://marykilvert.com)).*



## My path to success



### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Getting the shop ready to open in time for Frome's monthly artisan market. We only had a few weeks, so did a soft launch, then a couple of months later had a more impressive gathering with the mayor and a real sheep!

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU'D KNOWN BEFORE STARTING?

Working from home can be isolating. Renting a space in a studio alongside other designer-makers gave me the opportunity to network, which was a real boost.

### DID YOU FIND IT DIFFICULT RELOCATING FROM LONDON TO A MARKET TOWN?

I was nervous about moving from the capital to a quieter location. But my customers have a place where they can meet the person behind their products, which seems

to appeal. Although I think Bertie is the bigger draw!

### WHAT ACHIEVEMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

Owning my own shop is a dream come true. I have part-time help for when I'm in the studio but it's important for me to spend time talking to customers as it provides a chance to get feedback and ideas for new products.

### WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT YOUR JOB?

I enjoy the whole process – seeing an idea develop from a sketch in a notepad to a finished piece gives me a huge sense of satisfaction.

### ADVICE TO OTHERS?

If you're worried about making enough stock to fill a shop, work with other artisans. I sell blankets and soaps from Irish company Avoca, which share a similar colour palette.



# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

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## *homeware designer*

### DECIDING ON YOUR PRODUCT

**A NICHE** Create items with a strong identity as Mary has with her Colourful Sheep, or focus on an idea for a well-defined audience – for example, Paperboy Interiors just sells wallpaper and fabric for boys' bedrooms. This helps keep customer loyalty high, as you are the sole provider of a piece, and lowers marketing costs because you know where your clients are.

### HANDMADE VS OUTSOURCED

The 'Made in Britain' tag is increasingly popular with UK customers as well as those who are overseas, so keep this in mind when creating your collection. Using factories in this country has additional benefits, including reduced shipping costs. Visit your suppliers to ensure quality control. If you do go abroad, [alibaba.com](http://alibaba.com) is useful for finding manufacturers.

**TRADEMARKING** Whichever route you choose, it's important to protect your work by registering it at the Intellectual Property Office, prices from £170 ([ipo.gov.uk](http://ipo.gov.uk)). Or visit the British Library's IP Centre ([bl.uk/bipc](http://bl.uk/bipc)) for advice on protecting your designs and brand.



**STOCK MANAGEMENT** If you are making your range, you'll need a place to work – this could be a room in your home or a nearby studio. Remember you will want a storage and packing area, or you can outsource fulfilment if you're short of space. Companies such as My Warehouse ([orderfulfilment.co.uk](http://orderfulfilment.co.uk)) will prepare and post products on for you, on a pay-as-you-go basis.

### TAKING TO MARKET

**PRICING** First, assess the competition. Many creative businesses use a general rule of three to three-and-a-half times the

cost of materials. Test the market by selling at fairs and pop-ups, which enable you to see each customer's response. You can then adapt your price points.

**OPPORTUNITIES TO SELL** To set up online, you can create your own website or use a platform retailer such as Etsy ([etsy.com](http://etsy.com)) and Folksy ([folksy.com](http://folksy.com)). For a physical presence, try specialist markets, including Crafty Fox Market ([craftyfoxmarket.co.uk](http://craftyfoxmarket.co.uk)) or the Country Living Fairs ([countrylivingfair.com](http://countrylivingfair.com)), which attract trade buyers and individual customers. Approach local boutiques and galleries, and suggest you

sell on commission from their space, consider selling via QVC or offer your products as props on home-improvement shows or magazine shoots.

### GROWING THE BRAND

**RECRUITMENT** It's time to scale up production but, before hiring a team, test the water by outsourcing work to other experts to save on the administration and costs that come with being an employer. If you're simply looking for an extra pair of hands to help with making or selling, find talent through local craft groups on small business forums and via Twitter and Facebook.

**FUNDING** Need help taking your business to the next level? Look at government assistance schemes, such as StartUp Loans ([startuploans.co.uk](http://startuploans.co.uk)), or an increasingly popular route to raise cash is crowdfunding on sites such as [enterprisenation.com](http://enterprisenation.com), [kickstarter.com](http://kickstarter.com) and [indiegogo.com](http://indiegogo.com), which give you access to people who might finance the business, while also raising your profile. If you need £500 or less, try Enterprise Nation's Fund101, which awards two businesses every month with money to spend on supplies and promotion.





MAKING

# CREATING AN IMPRESSION

Combining her love of plants and pottery,  
Claire Powell's delicately patterned earthenware captures  
the beauty of her Gloucestershire cottage garden

WORDS BY **PAULA McWATERS** ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ANDREW MONTGOMERY**





a small patch of a flowerbed in her parents' garden is where Claire Powell's love of both plants and pottery began. She started growing quintessential country flowers such as sweet peas and forget-me-nots when she was six years old. Digging over the earth, Claire also discovered fragments of pottery, which she kept as if they were treasure. "I still have many of these pieces now," she says. "They started a collection that I've added to all my life."

The two passions that were sparked in childhood shape Claire's life in the village of Frocester, Gloucestershire, today. The garden that surrounds her pale-green workshop is as important as her clay and kiln: she hand-decorates her distinctive earthenware bowls, jugs, mugs and cheese domes with the leaves of cottage garden favourites. Hardy geraniums, delphiniums, lupins, nasturtiums and roses flourish here alongside willow and silver birch trees.

These fresh leaves serve as stencils over which Claire sprays the glaze onto her ceramics. "I overlay the leaves to give a three-dimensional effect and each one can be used only once, so no two pots are ever the same." The foliage is chosen for its differing qualities: lupins give a star effect whereas herb Robert and cow parsley create a lacier, more ethereal pattern. Each piece can have up to four or five layers of glaze in varying shades of blue, green or both: "The shapes are dream-like, giving an Impressionist effect as the glaze melts."

### SHAPING HER TALENT

Claire's career in pottery started in 1970 when she did a Ceramic Design course at Hammersmith College of Art and Building in London, followed by making glazes for Tingewick Pottery – a family-owned business in Buckinghamshire. "We sourced glazes to make slipware lamps in wonderful vibrant colours," she says. "It gave me a taste for experimenting ➡"





and I started making my own pots. Also I'm quite impatient and throwing gives quick results."

She began to develop her stencilling method in the mid-1980s while living on a farm in France with her ex-husband and two children. "I found painting with glaze difficult," she says. "Some friends suggested I try a spray gun instead, so I tried stencilling around leaves." She sold her pottery at a local market and it proved a great success. Later, as a single parent back in Britain, Claire retrained as a teacher to support the family and her pottery became little more than a hobby, until 11 years ago when she met her new husband Paul and moved to the Cotswolds.

Today, a pond with moorhens, a vegetable patch and roses provide an inspiring view from her workshop: "In the past I had to clear everything off

"I LIKE TO MAKE PRACTICAL PIECES. PEOPLE MUST BE ABLE TO USE THEM, NOT JUST LOOK AT THEM"

the kitchen table at the end of the day but now I have plenty of space." Claire starts with terracotta or white earthenware clay, judging each piece by eye and working it up on the wheel using gentle fingertip pressure. "The hand on the inside does all the work while the hand on the outside provides support," she explains, as her wheel whirs round. "I like to make practical pieces. People must be able to use them, not just look at them."

### SIGNATURE DESIGNS

The popular blue and turquoise glazes she first developed still influence the palette of her work and she mixes up

her own original colours. "Every so often I try out new colours and finishes," she says. "But these are my signature shades. I have repeat customers who might buy a bowl one year and come back for a cheese dome the next, so it's important to have some continuity."

She spends two to three days a week making the pots and biscuit-firing them, followed by a day deciding on patterns and then glazing. "A steep-sided bowl demands something large and bold," she explains, "whereas a small piece needs a more delicate pattern." With a trug over her arm, she goes in search of the right specimens, returning to the workshop with around



30-40 to experiment with. After glazing but before second firing, the pottery looks a dull matt grey and it is not until the bowls and jugs emerge from the kiln that the colours are revealed. "The excitement I feel when I open the kiln is as strong today as when I started," she says.

The unique quality of Claire's work has attracted a loyal following and she sells her ceramics at fairs, at Stroud Farmers' Market and from her studio. Despite her prolific output, Claire's in no danger of running out of ideas – many of the surfaces of her home are covered with her pots, tiles and bowls. "There's always some kind of plant life to use," she explains. "Even in winter there are the seed heads of alliums, which make wonderful designs." In the summer, though, when the garden is in its full glory, Claire is surrounded by subject matter. "It's impossible to go on holiday at that time of year – I simply can't tear myself away." ■

 **Claire Powell Pottery** (01453 827975; [claire-powell-pottery.co.uk](http://claire-powell-pottery.co.uk)).



## Get help with marketing

The creative industries employ more than 1.5 million people in the UK, and that figure is growing fast. There is, therefore, an increasing number of training opportunities that are specific to arts and crafts businesses. The University of the Arts in London runs short courses for designers, writers, photographers and other artists who want to set up their own enterprise. They cover the principles of marketing

and sales, as well as researching the market and understanding finance ([arts.ac.uk](http://arts.ac.uk)). Tessa Webb's series of Creatives into Business courses include specific classes and one-to-one support for particular disciplines. Visit [creativesintobusiness.com](http://creativesintobusiness.com).

The not-for-profit organisation Creative England provides loans, mentoring and direct investment. Find out more at [creativeengland.co.uk](http://creativeengland.co.uk).



MAKING

# INSPIRED BY NATURE

Inside her charming beach hut-cum-workshop in her Cambridgeshire garden, Emma Mitchell earns a living by crafting a range of beautiful silver jewellery

WORDS BY CATHERINE BUTLER ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER



From lab coats and test tubes to jewellery and a garden studio: Emma Mitchell's switch from science to craft doesn't seem the most likely of career moves. But alongside a burgeoning passion for biology, Emma began creating beaded necklaces at just six years old and feels that her lifelong loves are not so very far apart. "They're both about design," she says, as she slips off her plimsolls at the door of the studio in her cottage garden in the village of Reach, Cambridgeshire. "Seeing the film of a frog embryo developing is as utterly beautiful as any work of art – what links the two for me is nature."

Inspired by her mother and grandfather, both keen gardeners and amateur botanists, Emma has always been fascinated by the natural world and, since leaving her high-powered role in scientific patent analysis five years ago to be a hands-on mother to daughters Evie, nine, and Rosie, seven, it's the nature on her doorstep that has fuelled the ideas behind her designs. From the poppies, cow parsley and feverfew in her garden to fenland birds and fallen pine cones in the woodland behind her house, Emma ➞









"WRITING A REGULAR BLOG HAS HELPED ME TO REACH CUSTOMERS I COULDN'T HAVE FOUND OTHERWISE"

captures it all in tiny, detailed silver clay charms, which she sculpts by hand as adornments for her range of necklaces, bracelets and earrings made in her beach-hut studio. "My husband, Andy, and I have always dreamed of having one at Southwold, but could never afford it, so when he needed an office in which to work from home, we put a beach hut in the garden

instead," Emma says. They bought it in 2007 as a flatpack from a company in Holland, which also erected it. It then became Emma's in 2010, so she could use it for her first Open Studios. "The shed proved the perfect space to devote to starting my business." ≡

 **Emma Mitchell**  
([emmamitchelldesigns.co.uk](http://emmamitchelldesigns.co.uk)).

## Create a garden studio



Whether you've outgrown your kitchen table or just need your own space, a garden shed is the perfect solution but there are some basic ground rules for any office or studio.

You will work better with enough light, space and heat (and peace). In addition, don't underestimate the value of natural light, particularly for creative work – if you are starting from scratch with a new shed, position it for the best source and choose large windows or a skylight. If you're working throughout the year, you need an electricity supply certified by a qualified electrician. If customers or suppliers will be visiting your shed, think about access and the bother of a muddy garden – a path might be a good idea.

To find plans and tools for building a garden office for less than £2,500, see [gardenofficeplans.com](http://gardenofficeplans.com). The site [shedworking.co.uk](http://shedworking.co.uk) is a great resource for outdoor workers.





## The art of the craft

### WHEN DID YOU START MAKING SILVER-CLAY JEWELLERY?

I'd always created my own beaded necklaces but I took my first stall at a fair in 2002 and was amazed at how much I sold. I used to add vintage charms but didn't have the time or commitment to learn silversmithing myself. Then I found out about silver clay in 2008 and went on a course, discovering that it gave beautiful results. It was developed in Japan, using silver from reclaimed industrial equipment. This is ground into a powder and

combined with paper and cotton fibres that get burned off during the firing process, leaving you with 99 per cent silver.

### HOW DO YOU WORK WITH IT?

The clay comes in sealed bags – once opened, you only have ten minutes before it starts to dry

out. You need to work fast, because it's not cheap – about £40 for 20g – so I spend hours sketching first. Once you've moulded your shape, you let it dry, then fire it – I do this on the kitchen gas hob. You're then left with a layer of white silver oxide, which, once polished off, reveals the silver beneath. It's possible to finish one piece in around three hours. I run beginners' courses in silver clay and, because it can be fiddly, we use sugarcraft cutters to create shapes.

### HOW DO YOU ADD COLOUR?

With semi-precious stones, such as

fluorite or tourmaline, and also enamel – essentially coloured powdered glass, which I mix with water and apply with a paintbrush.

### HOW IMPORTANT IS YOUR BLOG FOR WORK?

Very – it has reached customers that I couldn't have found otherwise – I've had commissions from the United States and Australia – but it has also given me a network of like-minded friends. A group of us met in London recently for a 'Cake and Crafting' day. When you live in a rural location, as I do, that kind of community is a lifeline to the world beyond your studio door.





MAKING

# MATERIAL WORLD

Inspiring interior designer Sarah Osmond reveals how she made the huge leap from city-based lawyer to rural entrepreneur

WORDS BY RACHAEL OAKDEN ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER

I'll tell you the best thing about working from home," Sarah Osmond says as she walks up the stairs of her 17th-century house on the Cumbria-Lancashire border. "Earl Grey on tap and Radio 4 all day." Her tea mug and radio are always at hand in the first-floor studio that looks out towards hills criss-crossed with hedgerows. So is Betsy, the one-year-old black cocker spaniel leaning against a homemade gingham cushion on the window seat. "Luckily she doesn't shed much fur," says Sarah of the doe-eyed pet watching over the two chickens and Welsh mountain pony that complete the family's menagerie. A moulting dog would not be the best companion for a businesswoman whose stock includes Vanessa Arbutnott and GP & J Baker linens and silks.

"I've always had a thing for the feel of beautiful fabrics," says Sarah, who lives with her husband Simon and their three children, aged seven to 12, in the village of Priest Hutton. She grew up ten miles from here, on a beef and sheep farm near Kendal, but left to study law at university, eventually becoming an employment lawyer for a large firm. Her transition from solicitor to seamstress





began in 2002, when she and Simon were working in Birmingham and living in rural Warwickshire. “I was pregnant with our first daughter, Liddy, and after she was born I decided to be a full-time mum,” Sarah says. Six months later, however, she enrolled on a City & Guilds course in soft furnishings at Warwickshire College. “It was partly to keep sane,” she recalls. “But it was also an investment – I knew that I wanted to have my own business one day.”

## LEARNING THE ESSENTIALS

Given her creative instinct and sense of style, working with interiors was the obvious option. A booklet about rural women entrepreneurs, mounted on the cover of *Country Living* (‘Start Your Own Business’, 2003), confirmed her thoughts. “One of the profiles was of an interior designer,” she remembers, “so I kept it for inspiration.”

The course took two years and Sarah spent thousands on childcare in order to attend college two days a week, getting up early to complete projects before Liddy woke up. By the time it was finished, her second daughter, Georgie, was on the way. Then, in 2005, Simon was offered a job in Manchester. Rather than relocate to a city suburb, they bought Hawkshead House, a six-bedroom wreck in half an acre of land.

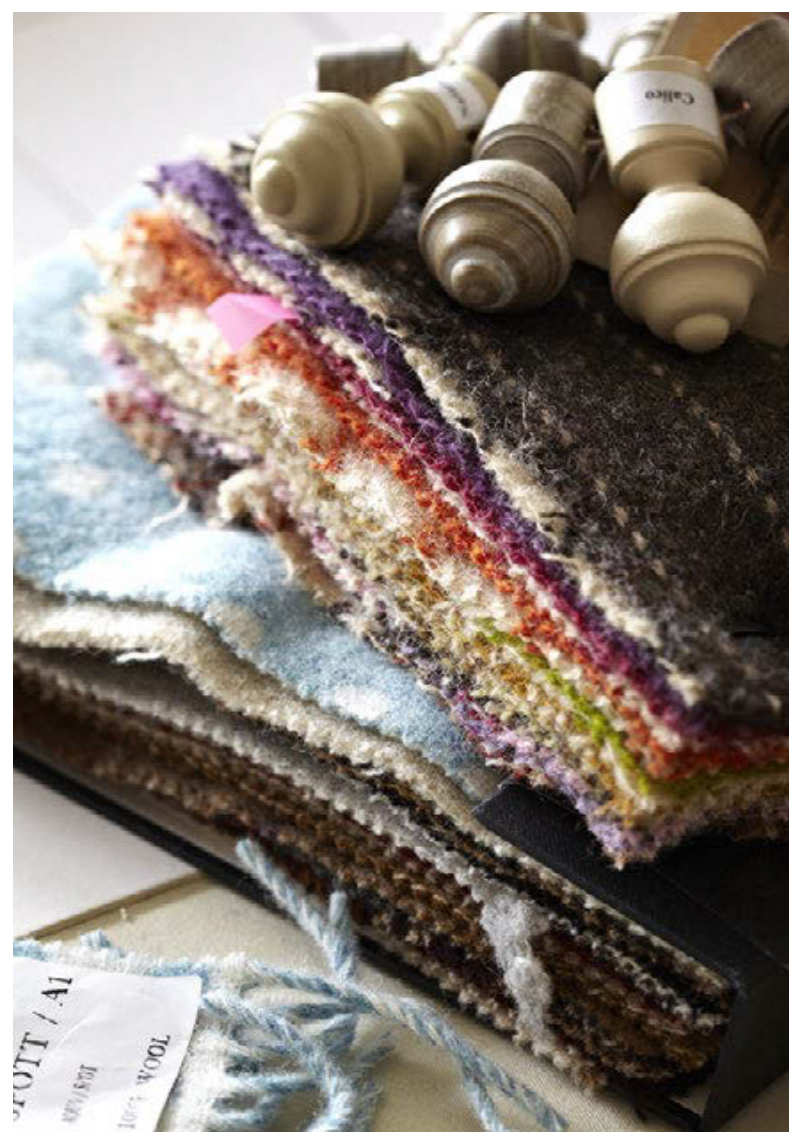
With a home to renovate, a third baby, Patrick, and a husband commuting for hours each day, most women would not launch a business. Yet opportunity strikes when you least expect it, and when Sarah was asked for decorating advice, she took a gamble. “I’d been making soft furnishings for family and friends for years, building up my skills, but wanted a challenge. A friend owned some holiday cottages nearby, and asked if I could give her ideas on how to style them. I said, ‘No. I’ll give you a quote.’ My heart was in my mouth.”

So began a steep transition in which Sarah went from curtain maker to project manager, designing furnishing



schemes, sourcing fabrics and, as word spread, finding local sewers to help her keep up with demand. Creating the interiors for Plato’s, a new boutique hotel in Kirkby Lonsdale, Cumbria, was a turning point. “That was my launchpad,” she says. But Sarah chose to build the business slowly, taking on jobs – from year-long commercial projects to two-hour home-decorating consultations – that she could fit around her family. “I needed to be able to enjoy time with my children,” she says. “If my clients asked to see me on a day when I didn’t have childcare, I’d take Patrick along. They got used to seeing him in a backpack, dropping biscuit crumbs in my hair.” Nearly six years after the launch, she still downs tools when the school bus pulls up at her front door: “How many jobs let you work from nine until three, then eight until ten, and give you an afternoon off to see the end-of-term play?”

Taking shape alongside the business has been Hawkshead House itself, as much a family home as it is a







SARAH ALSO RUNS A SEWING SCHOOL FROM HER HOME, TEACHING BEGINNERS WHO CAN'T EVEN THREAD A NEEDLE



showcase for Sarah's creative skills. For the past year, it has also been a source of extra income, as a sewing school: Sarah runs courses on which she teaches beginners "who can't thread a needle" how to measure and hand-stitch lined curtains and Roman blinds. It's the ideal next step for a sociable entrepreneur who misses the companionship of colleagues and loves being surrounded by like-minded women: "My favourite part of this job is meeting new people, then working with them to turn a blank space into something that really enhances their life." ■

 *Sarah Osmond Interiors* (01524 781261; [sarahosmondinteriors.co.uk](http://sarahosmondinteriors.co.uk)).



# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

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## *interior designer*

### BE PREPARED

**QUALIFICATIONS** Many interior designers are trained in the discipline or a related subject such as art or architecture. The British Institute of Interior Design ([biid.org.uk](http://biid.org.uk)) offers an in-depth list of degrees and shorter courses for anyone wanting to enter the industry. During your training, you will develop a particular style and approach, which will help you identify the right customers for your business.

### WORK FROM HOME

**CREATE A SPACE** It's great to start on the kitchen table but you'll soon discover that it's good for you (and your family) to have physical separation between your work and personal life. Find somewhere in the house – which has plenty of natural light – that can become a dedicated office. Place a sign on the door if appropriate so everyone knows when you're at work; it could be a spare room, a space under the stairs, an attic or even a garden shed (for advice on the latter, visit [shedworking.co.uk](http://shedworking.co.uk)).

**HAVE A VISION** Pin written business goals and beautiful images of favourite designs,

paint samples or fabric swatches that provide you with inspiration onto a board, which act as a daily motivator for being your own boss as well as a starting point for ideas and a display for work.

**TELL THE NEIGHBOURS** When starting a business from home, planning permission from the Local Authority (LA) is required if there will be an increase in traffic, noise and smells. Most interior designers will not create this kind of disturbance, but if you think that any disruption will be caused, it's best to notify your LA, and your neighbours to keep them on your side.

### MAKE SALES

**FACE-TO-FACE** Get out and about to events with business cards and fliers. Be clear about what you offer and how you stand out. Present a call to action on any promotional material so potential customers can follow up by visiting a website, sending an email or calling you. Agree to give talks whenever asked and consider hosting your own to help build your profile.

**ONLINE PRESENCE** Become known across the web by blogging on [blogger.com](http://blogger.com) or [wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com) and having a



presence on the main social media platforms: [twitter.com](http://twitter.com), [pinterest.com](http://pinterest.com) (an online pinboard, particularly suitable for designers), [facebook.com](http://facebook.com), [uk.linkedin.com](http://uk.linkedin.com) and [youtube.com](http://youtube.com). Written content about your work and images of the results on these powerful online platforms will mean you appear high up in internet search results when customers are looking for the services you provide.

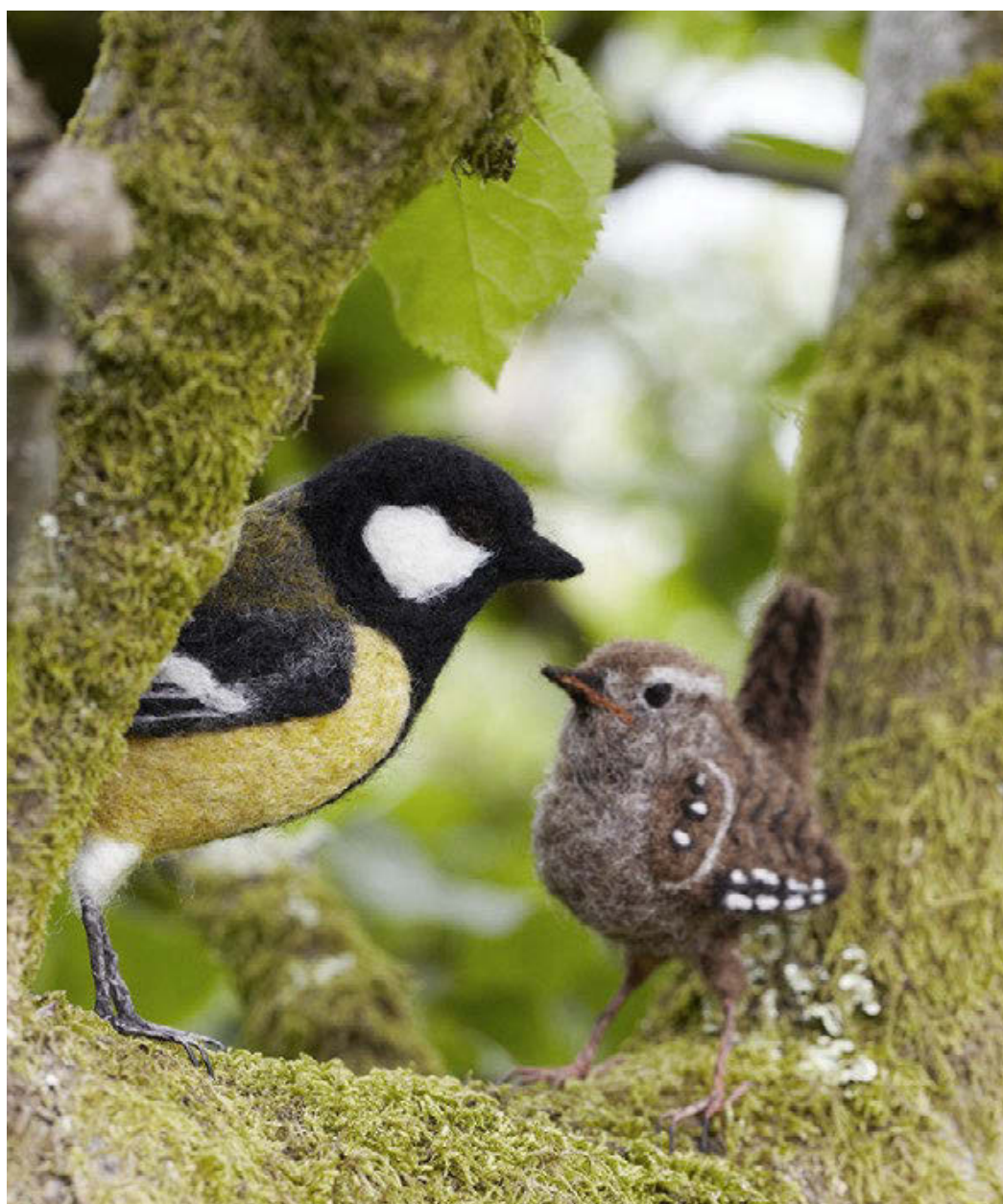
**PARTNERSHIPS** Approach architectural practices, furniture shops and property developers to suggest a tie-up. Research companies that your prospective customers are already using and tag yourself on as an additional and value-added

service. For example, if you're a specialist in kitchen interior design, contact kitchen shops, cookery schools and estate agents to target your customer base.

**TESTIMONIALS** Ask clients to help you by writing reviews of your work, which can be shared online and via marketing material. Positive feedback offers people the confidence to get in touch about a commission.

**TIME MANAGEMENT** Once you're up and running, follow what is called the golden triangle rule – spend roughly a third of your time on three things: customer care, business development and administration. This will help keep your personal and work life in balance.





MAKING

# FLIGHTS OF FANCY

Nature and art combine to remarkable effect inside Eve O'Neill's Carmarthenshire studio, where she turns bags of local sheep's wool into flocks of beautiful birds

WORDS BY CAROLINE ATKINS ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRENT DARBY









In Eve O'Neill's top-floor workroom, the treasures of the nature table have taken root and created an indoor forest. Ivy, collected from woodland paths, trails over mirrors, while clumps of moss and lichen spill out of an open drawer. There are flowers, feathers and curls of tree bark in a willow trug that she's just brought back from a forage walk. Creamy white caps of fungus appear to be growing out of the fireplace and a fragile dragonfly skeleton hangs like a wire ornament in the window that looks across to the Carmarthenshire hills.

It's hard to tell where nature becomes art because among her outdoor finds are the lifelike birds Eve makes from felted wool, some perched on branches or peeping out of wall-mounted boxes, others squeezed in moss-lined teacups or hand-woven nests, or posed in woodland settings in display cases. A half-finished robin stands on her work table, and the pink breast plumage of what appears to be a chaffinch glows against the black and white of its wings. "Actually, that's a bullfinch," Eve points out, gesturing to the darker beak and head. She goes on to explain further distinctions: "If eggs are blue or speckled, they're from an open nest like a blackbird's, whereas if they're white, they've been laid in a hole – wrens' nests are shaped like igloos."

### ESCAPE TO THE COUNTRY

You wouldn't guess from her knowledge that Eve had spent most of her life in London and had never seen a wren before moving here ten years ago – let alone the buzzards, tree creepers and red kites of Welsh forests and mountains. But watching wildlife is all the more fascinating to someone who lived in Brixton until she was 30: "When I was growing up, Mum would take me and my sister to Epping Forest or Richmond Park, but it wasn't like being surrounded by nature, as we are here." Back then, Eve escaped into an imaginary world,



designing miniature tabletop worlds inhabited by Plasticine animals. Now her Fforestfelt business mixes nature and model-making, and her jaunty birds fly out of the studio to buyers as far away as America and Switzerland.

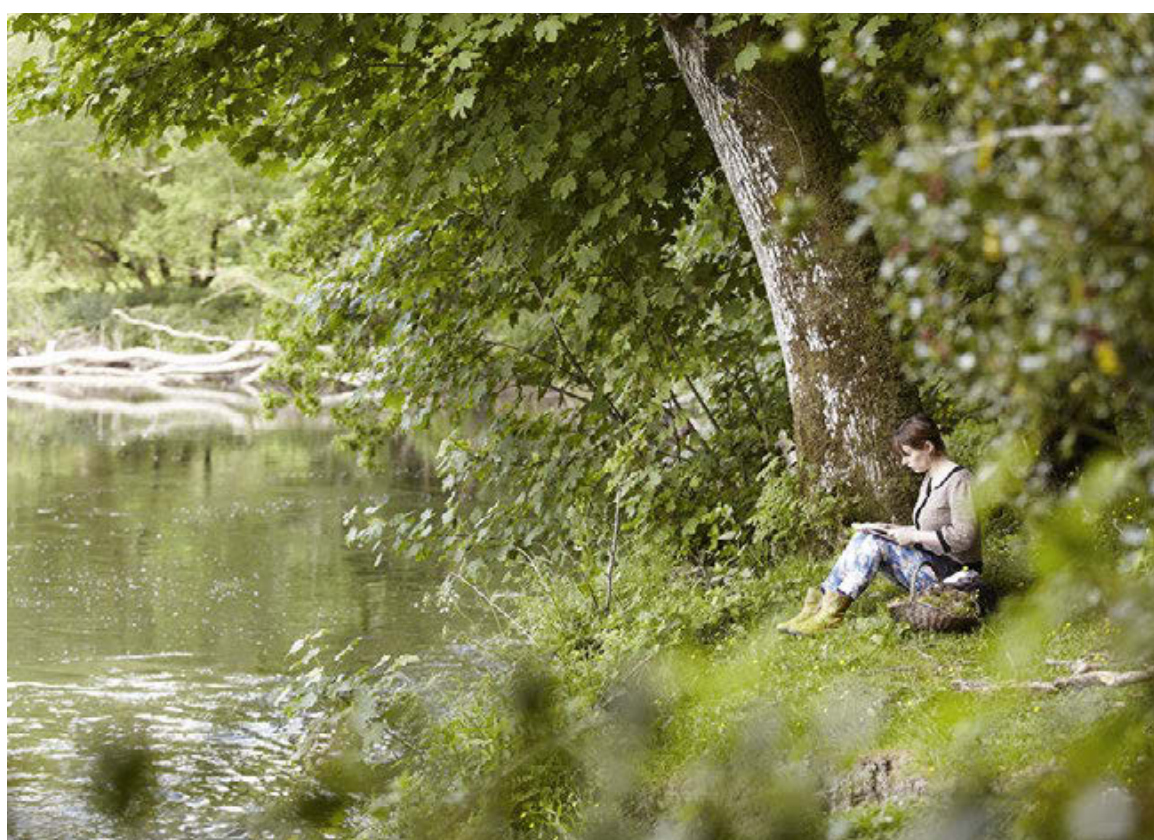
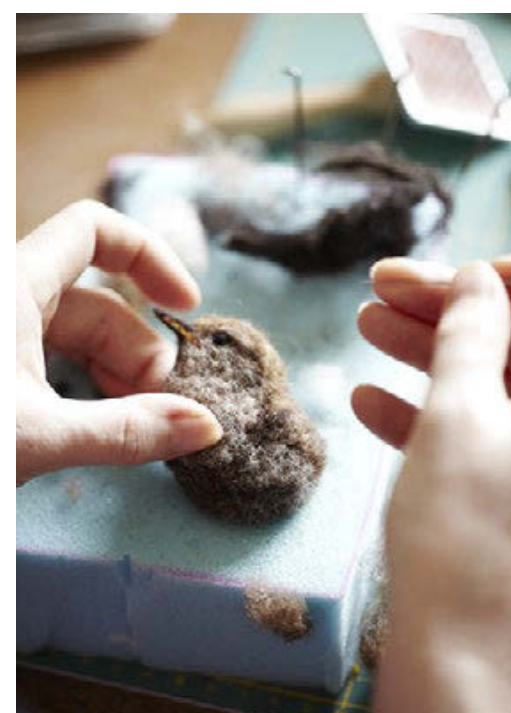
### SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL

Eve has always loved working on a small scale. As a teenager, she made tiny plates of food out of modelling clay, which she sold to dolls' house shops, and at art school she reduced her pictures to postcard-size. By the age of 30, she was dissatisfied with painting and wanted a new direction. Then the death of her closest friend,

EVE WAS TAUGHT TO  
NEEDLEFELT – A  
RELATIVELY NEW  
TECHNIQUE ADAPTED  
FROM INDUSTRY  
– BY A LOCAL WOMAN

Mick – an artist and collector – changed everything. He left her his house in his will, and selling it gave Eve and her mother the chance to start a new life. “It was Mum’s idea to come to Wales,” Eve says. “But she only knew it from property programmes on TV. All I was sure of was that it rained often.” It was a culture shock coming from the capital, but they fell in love with the area and found a pretty Victorian house in the hamlet of Drefach Felindre. The garden backs on to the River Tivy, there’s a post office nearby (essential for mail order) and buses to Carmarthen and Newcastle Emlyn. They love the community, too. “People smile at you in the street,” Eve says. She also found that Drefach Felindre is an old weaving settlement and a magnet for makers, so got to know other craftspeople, as well as foragers and woodlanders, who taught her how to identify birds, nests, fungi and animal tracks.

Keen to use local materials, Eve started designing in wool, but couldn’t achieve the detail she needed for small-scale work. Then she met May Clegg, who showed her how to needlefelt – a relatively new craft adapted ➔





## Learn needlefelting



### **CRAFT DAYS, SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX**

This shop-cum-course centre offers a wide range of monthly needlefelting workshops, from evening sessions to one-day classes (maximum group size of 12). All materials provided (01799 218429; [craft-days.co.uk](http://craft-days.co.uk)).

### **HOTCH POTCH, HAVERFORDWEST, PEMBROKESHIRE**

Whether you're an advanced crafter or a beginner, you'll be welcome at this workshop. Join Julie Smithson around her

table for a course in needlefelting (maximum class size of eight). All materials provided as well as a kit to take home. Places cost £18. Call for details of dates (01437 760971).

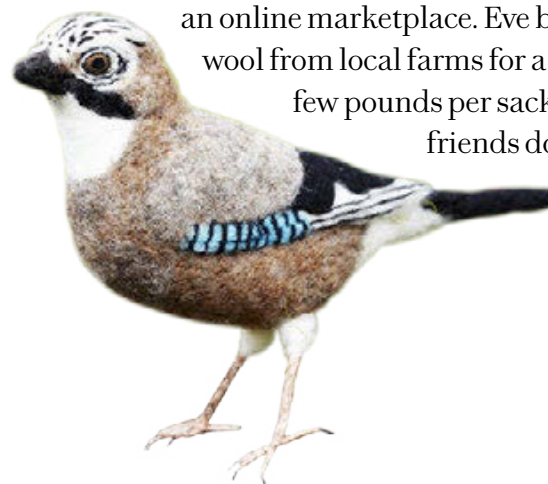
### **ALL THINGS FELT AND BEAUTIFUL, BUDBROOKE, WARWICKSHIRE**

For a beginner's guide to needlefelting, join Sophie Wheatley for a fun-filled day of crafting and biscuits. All materials provided. Places cost £45. Call for details of dates (07706 279252; [feltandbeautiful.co.uk](http://feltandbeautiful.co.uk)).

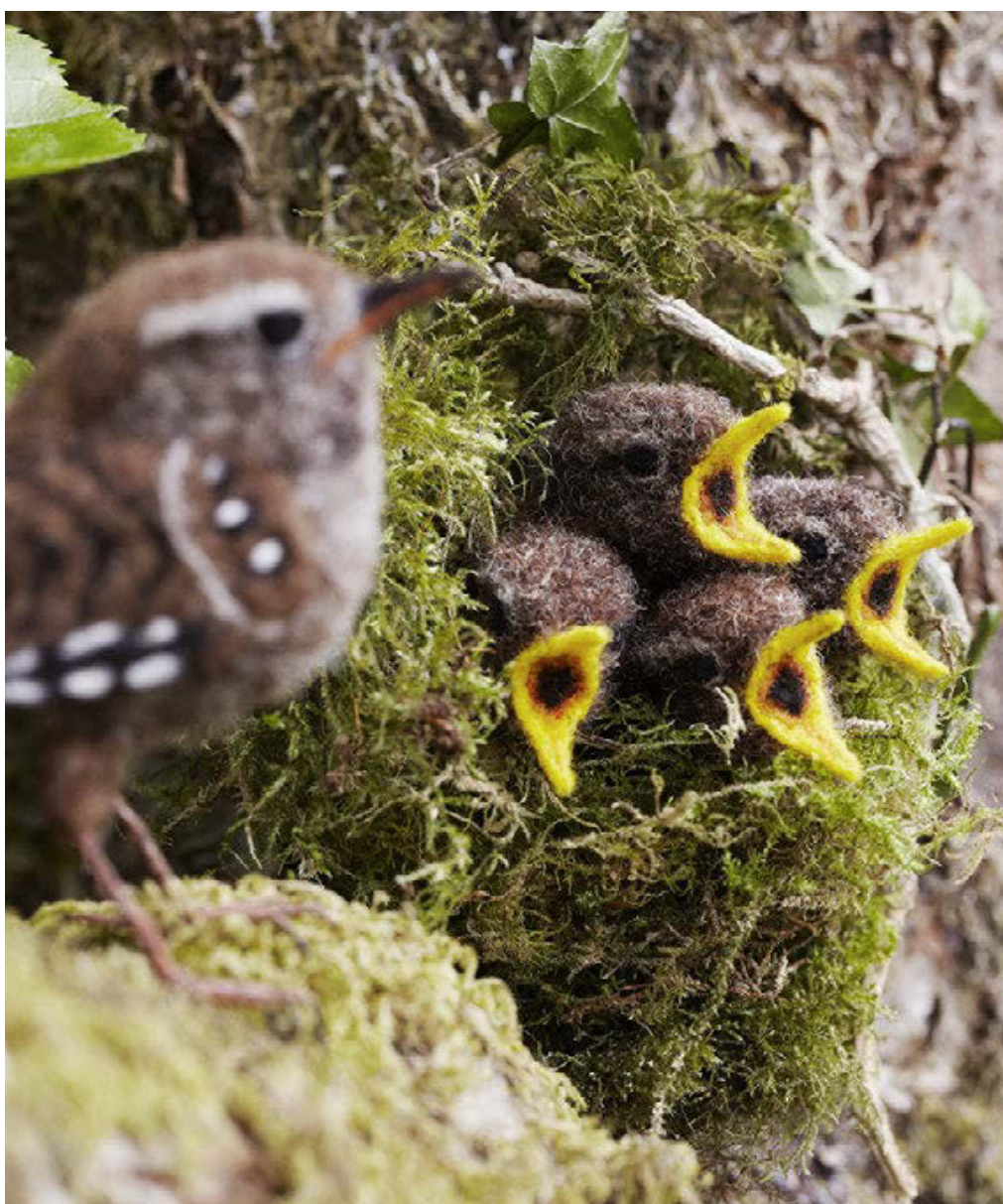


from car-seat upholstery in the early 1980s. The industrial process involved multiple needles, but in hand-felting, a single one is used to sculpt loose wool into structured forms. Watching Eve at her work, it's easy to see that she is a master of the craft. She pulls a clump of mid-brown wool from one of the baskets in her studio and starts working at it with a four-inch L-shaped needle, stabbing up and down through the wool until the fibres mesh and the loose shape shrinks into a compressed ball. The needle has tiny barbs along its point and these 'weave' the strands together. Her first models were of leaping hares, which sold well at craft fairs. Soon she began selling miniature hares and foxes before re-creating the birds she saw on her walks and selling them through an online marketplace. Eve buys

wool from local farms for a few pounds per sack and friends donate







## THE WOOL IS BOUGHT FROM LOCAL FARMS FOR A FEW POUNDS PER SACK AND FRIENDS DONATE FUR FROM THEIR PET RABBITS

pet rabbit and guinea pig fur. If she needs a specific colour she dyes white wool. It takes Eve two large handfuls – and about a day – to make a wren, creating the body first, followed by the head, breast and feather lines. The wings and tails are produced separately, then worked in. She mainly uses natural shades – creams and browns from sheep including Jacob's, Herdwick and Welsh mountain breeds. "It's hard to find pure black," she says. "The younger the sheep, the blacker the wool, but it's also softer, which

makes it difficult to sculpt." The surrounding countryside, where Eve forages for material to decorate her display cases, provides plenty of inspiration. The nearby hamlet of Henllan, with a woodland planted with ancient oaks and criss-crossed by deer tracks, is one of her favourite walks: "Last time I was there I saw three wrens, a woodpecker and a coal-tit, all within ten minutes." The river at the end of her garden is perfect for bird-watching and sketching out ideas, and she has a collection of nature books to check her

accuracy. Her creations are all realistic enough to tempt her three cats, and a curious tabby purrs its way around the studio door: "Laurie had his eye on my first magpie when I was making it, and ripped it to pieces when it was finished!"

Her current projects include a greater spotted woodpecker and a long-tailed tit. She wants to try a nuthatch, too, and has sent a clutch of wrens, a blackbird, a songthrush and an owl to a buyer in Monmouth. She's sketching new ideas all the time – a display box of nest-building wrens and another of blackbirds sitting on eggs – happy to continue creating whimsical scenes, which combine the world of nature and that of her imagination. ■

**i Fforestfelt (07811 609472;**  
***fforestfelt.co.uk*).**



MAKING

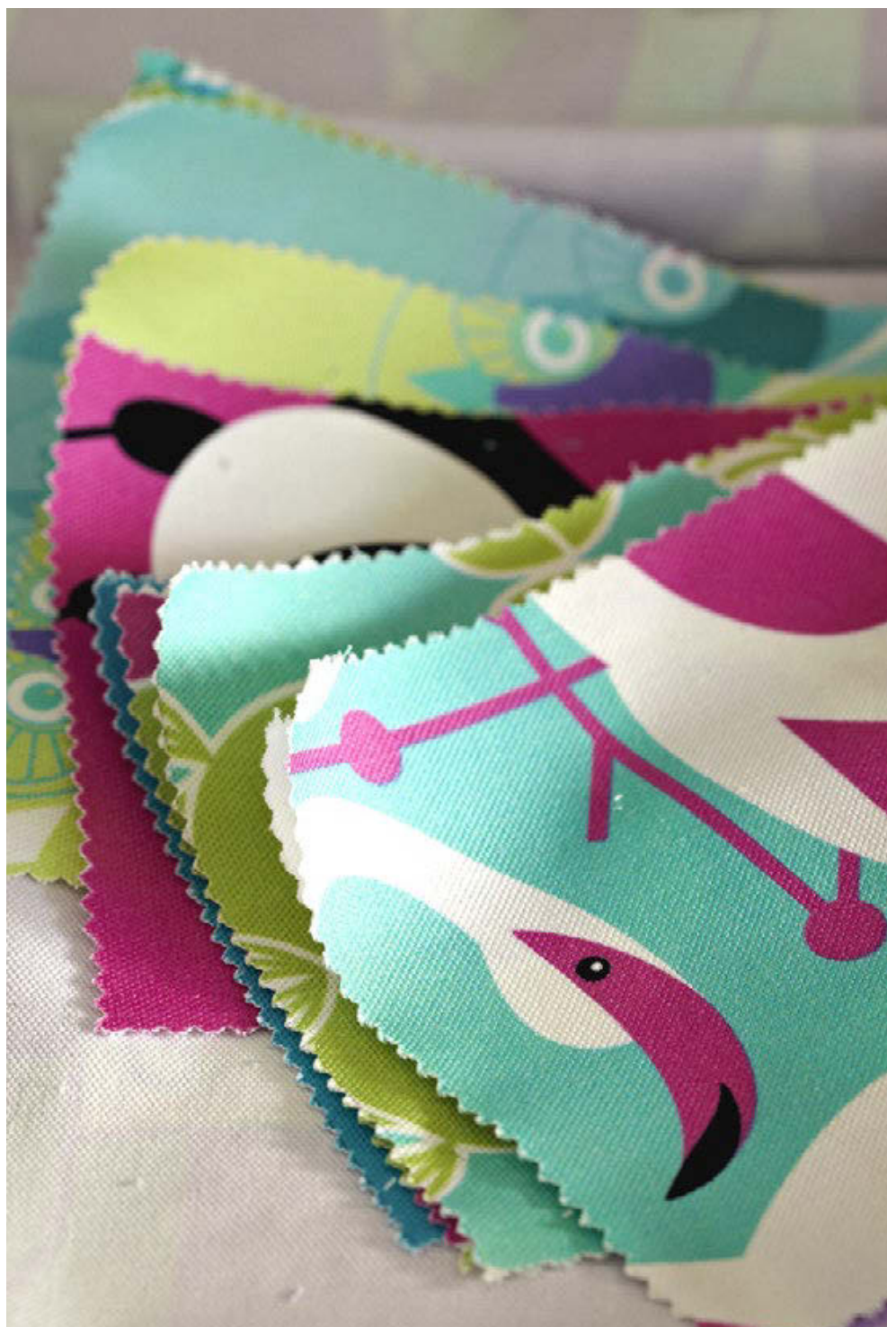
# GOING INTO PRINT

Meet designer Georgia Wilkinson, who taps into the trend for vintage homeware by creating 1960s-inspired fabrics from a former cricket pavilion in the North Yorkshire countryside

WORDS BY LISA SYKES ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER

a flagstone path through an apple orchard and wild-flower meadow leads to a 1930s cricket pavilion. In the field beyond the veranda, a calf suckles and a peahen's plumed fascinator bobs through yellowing grasses – a tranquillity only heightened by the sounds of birds on the breeze. Welcome to the workspace of Georgia Wilkinson.

Given her natural surroundings, it isn't surprising that Georgia's 1960s-inspired textiles feature stylised images of flora and fauna. Magpies, ladybirds, bees and, for her latest collection, peonies, pansies and poppies jump out from the fabric rolls and products stored on shelves around the pavilion. To the left was the visiting team's dressing room, now the HQ of Georgia's business, Georgia Wilkinson Ltd. It's also where she creates her motifs before, in the home side's area, turning them into a range of cushions, lampshades, tea towels and noticeboards, now sold through her website and in shops nationwide. She has been working from the cricket pavilion since 2009, when she returned to her parents' 511-acre arable farm in the Vale of York, following two years working as a designer in London. Her ➔







VISITORS



first change was to paint over the dark tongue-and-groove panels to make the space feel lighter. She left the 'Visitors' and 'Home' signs on the team changing rooms and kept a set of bench lockers. There wasn't much structural work to do apart from taking out the shower and installing a loo. Her father plumbed in the water supply and hooked up electricity: "I wanted a woodburning stove but went for practicality in the end; I can switch my convection heater on in an instant. This is a studio and workspace first and foremost."

## CRAFTING A FUTURE

Before setting up her own business, Georgia worked at a British textile printers, creating fabrics for Vanessa Arbuthnott, Lewis & Wood and Bennison. "I learned so much there but was desperate to produce my own designs." Without the funds to rent a studio, the empty pavilion proved to be the perfect space. The rolls of cotton flat-weave fabric are produced by a Macclesfield-based company, but Georgia prints the linen for her tea towels and some of the cushions by hand: "I work out the patterns for both in the style of a woodcut, first in pencil, then in gouache." She scans the designs into her computer and emails them to the printers. For the hand-printed pieces, she sends drawings to a firm in York, which produces acetate stencils. From these, Georgia can screen-print onto linen. With the aid of modern technology, the designer can run her modern business smoothly from this rural location, which also provides her with plenty of inspiration: "I get my ideas from the farm. My first fabric featured hares – there are lots around here – plus I can walk to work and tend to the hens, geese and sheep. Why would I want to leave?" ■

**i** Georgia Wilkinson (07894 205491; [georgiawilkinson.co.uk](http://georgiawilkinson.co.uk)).



## Licensing your designs

This can be a good way to generate income, but you will need to approach manufacturers and convince them that your artwork is better than others' – these people see many designs, so you must sell yourself. Remember that in licensing you lose some of the control and receive only a fraction of the product sales' value.

Once you have secured a manufacturer, there are three ways to get paid for your designs: *Commission only* – a fixed fee not dependent on actual sales, which is risk-free but one-off. *Royalties only* – a percentage of each sale, which can be lucrative

if (and it's a big "if") the product is actually launched and sells well. *Advance against royalties* – a mix of the two, with an initial payment and a royalty if the product sells enough to cover the initial payment.

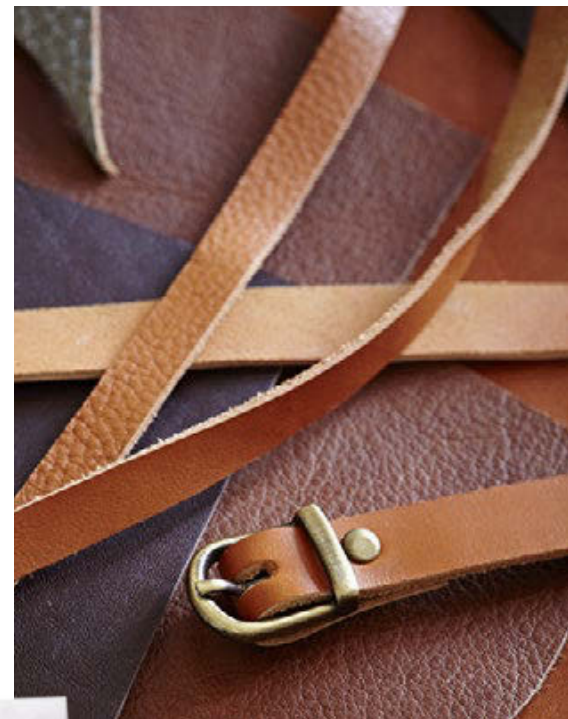
Whatever deal you strike, make sure you have good legal advice when viewing drafts of the contract. If this is the route you are taking, consider also protecting your designs. You can safeguard them and stop others copying your work using the Government legal Design Right facility ([gov.uk/design-right](http://gov.uk/design-right)). It registers your design, but it doesn't include enforcement (which is the expensive part of the process).





"AFTER SCREENPRINTING,  
I AIR DRY THE FABRIC  
AND SET THE DESIGN IN MY  
GRAN'S OLD IRONING PRESS  
– IT'S VERY LOW-TECH"





MAKING

# BAGS OF INSPIRATION

Once Rohan Jelf was a PA – now she crafts a range of accessories, driven by her desire to create pieces that are useful and beautiful

WORDS BY **RACHAEL OAKDEN** • PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ALUN CALLENDER**





"I BASE MY COLLECTION ON THE BAGS I LIKE: THOSE THAT ARE SIMPLE AND TIMELESS"

Japanese aesthetic she'd admired during a year spent living in Japan, Rohan nurtured the idea of making fashion accessories. But she bided her time while raising Oliver and twin daughters Frances and Ada, now eight.

### THE TURNING POINT

In 2008, Rohan made her first serious investment: a five-day beginners' course run by the Devon-based traditional leatherworker John Hagger. "It was life-changing," she says. "I knew this was the direction I wanted to take." She returned home laden with specialist tools and a head full of ideas. But until her children started school three years later, sewing – on two industrial machines in her living room – was restricted to late nights and early mornings. "I practised whenever I could, using off-cuts from leather wholesalers and studying bags bought from ebay," she remembers. In between childcare and two house moves – the family now lives in Lincolnshire – she managed to fit in more courses, some run by John Hagger, others by London fashion schools. "I played around with styles, but based my collection on the bags I like: those that are simple and timeless."

When Rohan finally felt ready to show her products to the public, she found there was more to running her business than being creative. "There was this dawning realisation that I also had to promote and sell things," she says. Her first commercial outing was a local craft fair in 2012 ("Hardly anyone came, but that gave me the chance to talk to other stallholders") and, several months later, she took part in the Kitchen Table Talent Pop-up Market. "I got advice ➡

Rohan Jelf doesn't go in for designer handbags. Which is just as well because the first thing she does when she gets a new holdall is tear it apart. "It's the best way to find out how they have been put together," she says. Having learned her craft largely through trial and error, this up-and-coming leatherworker is beginning to get noticed for the simplicity of her designs. Visitors to *Country Living's* Pop-up Market at the Spring Fair two years ago found delicate drawstring pouches, chunky totes and canvas shoppers, all handcrafted

by Rohan using the highest-quality vegetable-tanned leather.

It was during maternity leave from her job as PA to Burberry's global president that Rohan decided to follow her creative instincts. She knew that commuting to London from the Cambridgeshire home she shared with her partner Richard would not be feasible once their baby (Oliver, now ten) arrived. "I'd always sewn for fun, and had a yearning to design and craft something beautiful yet useful," she says. Inspired by the workmanship of the leather bags she'd seen at Burberry sample sales, as well as the utilitarian



from the CL team on how to create a brand," she says. Rohan subsequently embossed every bag with a logo of a crane, a Japanese symbol of longevity and good fortune. Now based in her own studio, Rohan prides herself on attention to detail: "I sew at a hand-stitching pace to ensure a perfectly straight, even seam, and produce 'turned' bags, which means they are stitched inside out."

In February 2013, she launched The Traditional English Apron Company and website, named after an addition to her collection: a waxed cotton apron with a leather pocket and straps, plus a Land Girls' bag – a canvas shopper bound with soft water-buffalo hide (using vegetable-tanned European leather as with the rest of her ranges). "Selling products online will enable me to grow as a business," Rohan says. For now, her workforce consists of her supportive family. "I couldn't have done any of this without Richard," she says, "and I'm proud to show my children that if you work hard, it's possible to achieve a fantastic end result." ■

**Rohan Jelf** (0844 318 1465; [rohanjelf.com](http://rohanjelf.com)).



## My path to success



### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Time management. I work before my children wake up and after they've gone to bed and, if I'm preparing for a show, I'll stay up until midnight.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN BEFORE STARTING OUT?

How to manage my company accounts. Not paying for an accountant may cut costs, but it's just not worth the risk or the stress and, if I had been more organised and recorded my incomings and outgoings as I had gone along, I could have saved myself a lot of time.

### WHAT HAS BEEN A HIGHLIGHT?

Being asked to exhibit at GROW London – a new garden fair – by one of the organisers who visited my stand at The Land Rover Burghley Horse Trials. I was also proud to be selected as

one of eight up-and-coming designer-makers at the Festival of Living Crafts at Hatfield House in Hertfordshire.

### WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT YOUR WORK?

I love turning a leather hide and roll of fabric into a bag or an apron. Whether I'm working on a new design or enjoying the repetitive nature of making something familiar, I find the process incredibly therapeutic.

### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHERS?

Talk to people who you know are going to be honest and whose tastes resemble those of your target customer. I had a lot of feedback from well-meaning friends and family members, but if I'd listened to everything and acted on it, I could have ended up trying to please people and compromising my designs.



# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

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## *fashion & accessories*

### GET GOING

#### **FIND YOUR UNIQUE SELLING**

**POINT** This is the reason why people will buy your products and not your competitors'. But remember the majority of bags sold are classic black or brown and you don't want to be left with unwanted stock.

Instead, focus on providing quality, good-value items.

**SHOW OFF** Wear your pieces in public at every opportunity and, if your budget allows, let friends and family use them and hand out your business cards (if people ask about them), too. Exhibiting at regional and national events such as the Country Living Fairs (*countrylivingfair.com*), will give customers the chance to experience your product.

#### **INVEST IN PHOTOGRAPHY**

It's worth getting quality pictures taken to use on your website and for any marketing material. Contact local photographers or, if you're on a small budget, approach students at respected art colleges to see if they'd help you for free, in exchange for raising their profile.

**USE SOCIAL MEDIA** Fashion accessories are very visual, so, as well as using Twitter to promote your brand, get to

grips with Instagram and Pinterest, too.

#### **DON'T UNDERSELL YOURSELF**

Ensure your retail price not only covers your raw material costs, overheads and time, but also allows room to make a sufficient profit.

### GROW YOUR ENTERPRISE

**CHOOSE YOUR NICHE** Decide whether you're a 'craft' or a 'fashion' brand. If the latter, you'll need to develop at least two trend-led collections per year.

**FIND A MANUFACTURER** As your enterprise develops, you may need help to meet demand. Search the UKFT's database of factories to find one that meets your requirements at *ukft.org*.

#### **PICK A ROUTE TO MARKET**

Opening your own shop can be expensive, so try to use pop-ups and online marketplaces to test the water first before committing. Find opportunities in fashion magazines and via relevant websites and blogs.

**ENTER AWARDS** Get noticed in your industry by applying for competitions such as the WGSN Global Fashion Awards and the NatWest UKFT Awards 2014, which has a category for start-ups.



home-tanned skins from John Hagger to create accessories, including a belt, money pouch and strap, plus learn how to set rivets and press-stud fasteners to your work (07738 634136; *leatherschool.co.uk*).

**REBECCA-JANE, CRANLEIGH, SURREY**

Discover key leather techniques such as how to carve, emboss and dye, attach magnetic closures and master industrial sewing machines,

#### **PRIORITISE CUSTOMER SERVICE**

Providing separate emails for orders, delivery queries and marketing enquiries gives consumers confidence to buy from you.

### HONE YOUR TALENT

Whether you want to start a business or develop an existing skill, there's a course for you to enjoy...

#### **TANNER BATES, TOTNES, DEVON**

Find out about different types of leather, then use

while producing your own belt, dog collar, clutch or handbag on a one- or two-day course (07711 316190; *rebecca-jane.com*).

**GLENCAIRN LEATHER, MORAR, INVERNESS-SHIRE**

Join two other beginners for a three-day course, and master basic skills and practices. Make a lead, collar, belt or bag – or even your own sporran! B&B is also available (01687 450600; *glencairnleather.com*).



## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE #3:

# Writing a business plan

### PEOPLE TIE THEMSELVES IN KNOTS WHEN IT COMES TO CREATING THIS DOCUMENT.

In reality, it is just a statement outlining your business, your goals and how to achieve them. How detailed the plan is depends on who your reader is. An externally focused one is required when your venture requires professional financing or funding; it is written for the stakeholders and investors who will want to be sure that their investment is sound. It should contain information about all the costs and overheads, activities and resources. You will probably need to be able to justify your sales forecast figures and anticipated income.

### MOST SMALL BUSINESS START-UPS DO NOT NEED SUCH A SOPHISTICATED DOCUMENT.

An internally focused one is usually sufficient; this describes the structure, the product, the marketing and some financial spreadsheets.

### TEMPLATES ARE READILY

**AVAILABLE ONLINE** – go to [gov.uk/write-business-plan](http://gov.uk/write-business-plan).

Think of the sections (including cash flow, mission statements and marketing plan) as tools. This ensures your business is properly structured, stays on track and has a series of checks and balances. If you are not sure what to write in each section, look at some of the example plans at [bplans.co.uk](http://bplans.co.uk).

### MOST BUSINESS PLANS START WITH AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY,

which is probably the most important section. It is a review of the rest of the document; it outlines the enterprise, the product and the activities. It should be concise but must pack a punch – it's your start-up in a nutshell. Leave this until last – when you have completed the rest of the plan, you should be able to pick the key facts and figures and give a passionate and convincing summary of your business.



**WHICHEVER KIND YOU ARE WRITING, THE EXERCISE OF PUTTING IT DOWN ON PAPER HELPS TO CLARIFY YOUR THOUGHTS.** It sets out the strategy and operation of the business, gives you a blueprint for activity, a starting benchmark and a set of rules to help you stay in control. You can't know everything when you first start out, so treat your business plan as a working document, re-read it often and consider whether you are sticking to the plan. If not, ask yourself why and accept that it may not matter. As you gain experience and the enterprise moves forward, so will your plan; add notes and thoughts.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GETTY; CLAIRE RICHARDSON; NATO WELTON



# THE MAIN ELEMENTS

**LEGAL STATUS OF BUSINESS** Sole trader or limited company are the most popular. As a sole trader, you must register as self-employed with [hmrc.go.uk](http://hmrc.go.uk); as a limited company with [companieshouse.gov.uk](http://companieshouse.gov.uk).

**BUSINESS NAME** Remember that many aspects of your start-up will change as it grows, but its name won't, so spend time choosing the right one. Avoid those used by other businesses – it confuses customers (and isn't allowed if you are a limited company). If possible, include what you do in the name, as it helps people find you. Make it easy to spell and say, and check that it doesn't look odd typed out. Don't over-think it – simple and memorable is best (think Google and Next).

**WEBSITES** Be web aware from the start and find a domain that is consistent with your company – try [nominet.co.uk](http://nominet.co.uk). Those that contain your personal name or what you do fare well in search engines – eg “JuliaSmithJewellery”. Again, ease of spelling is important for web addresses. For rules about websites, see [ukwda.co.uk](http://ukwda.co.uk) (click on blog and then Is Your Website Legal?).

**MISSION STATEMENT** This succinctly describes what you do and how you are going to do it. It can also express your values or your promise to customers. Try to avoid generic words such as professional or cheapest – be honest and add some of your own personality. A good example is ebay's mission: ‘to provide a global platform where practically anyone can trade practically anything’.

**INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY** If you think you need to protect your work, visit [ipo.gov.uk](http://ipo.gov.uk) to see if it is feasible, but beware as it can be expensive. Ensure you are not infringing anybody else's rights by using names, designs and products illegally.

**BUSINESS GOALS** Break down the big picture into your short-, medium- and long-term goals. Try to make sure your goals are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timed), so you can tick them off as your business journey progresses.

**INSURANCE** Consider these four main types: premises, public liability, product liability and, if you are

advising in any way, professional indemnity. You also need business cover for your car.

**FINANCES** Don't put this off – understanding the money side is the sign of a successful business. Detail how much the product costs and what the profit is, the running costs and cost of sale. Get this right from the start and you will always know what works and how profitable the business is. If you feel unable to do this, engage an accountant from the start (and make it clear in your business plan).

**MARKETING PLAN** Define what you are selling and who is buying. With your customers, your competitors and the market in mind, devise an action plan of how you are going to reach your customers and when, broken down month by month and tracked against sales – in the long term, it means you can easily spot what works.

**RESEARCH** Just because you love the product, it doesn't follow that everyone else will. Ask questions, talk to people, send out surveys and use social media to ensure you understand the market and your customers.





# GROW IT SOW

If you dream of spending days outside surrounded by plants, learn how to make money from your green fingers







GARDENING

# THE FARM IN FULL BLOOM

Sam Ellson plants, sows and harvests fragrant roses, herbs  
and hedgerow flowers from her fields and paddocks to create  
rustic bouquets and traditional country-garden posies

WORDS BY CATHERINE BUTLER ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURA EDWARDS







Sam Ellson slips out of her farmhouse door and makes her way across the garden, secateurs in hand and the youngest of her three Border collies, Buster, racing back and forth from her heel. Her journey to work couldn't be more different to that of seven years ago. Passing through an old gate that separates her rambling garden from the 100 acres of farmland worked by her husband Robin, it is not the earthy smell of their Herdwick sheep that is carried up on the morning breeze, but something far more delicate – a sweet scent with a trace of nostalgia.

After 20 years of working for high-street fashion brands, and enduring a daily 130-mile commute to Liverpool, Sam finally swapped her briefcase for a wooden trug and her office for a field of roses. “I didn't have green fingers, just a vision,” says Sam,

who, aside from a lifelong love of flowers, had no horticultural experience at all before launching The Traditional Flower Company in 2006, cultivating roses, herbs and other blooms on her farm near Stone in Staffordshire: “I hadn't grown anything up until ten years ago when I planted 200 roses in my garden. I was amazed by how they took off.” Despite always yearning to run her own business, it was only when Sam was made redundant from her position as merchandising director of Littlewoods in 2005 that she began plotting her new direction: “I have a design degree, and so much of merchandising is about figures, so I was always a bit frustrated. It was only when I lost my job that I realised this was my chance to be more creative.”

Rather than launching into her new venture blindly, Sam set about planning her now thriving business,



which employs a team of three local members of staff, José, Cath and Tim, and has a vintage country style that has attracted such a following it has weddings booked several years ahead. “I knew I wanted to do something on the farm, but it couldn't take too much acreage away from the sheep,” she says. “Cut flowers were the perfect solution, because you can do a lot in a small space.”

### COMING UP ROSES

Traditional scented roses were Sam's flower of choice – not only do they like the clay soil but, to her, fragrance is as important as appearance: “It's not all about looking good – they must smell beautiful, too.” Using her redundancy package as a buffer, she took a year out to test the viability of her idea and ➔



planted 4,000 rose bushes in an empty paddock. Five months later, in mid-June 2007, they were in full bloom and picked, arranged into rustic bouquets and posies, loaded into her new retro-fitted van and bound for local farmers' markets where she could experiment with prices and arrangements: "It showed me that doing this was going to involve hard graft, but I would love it."

By the end of the year, Sam was determined to make the business work, but knew that to earn a full-time wage, she had to think big. "I needed a polytunnel to extend my growing season, and an extra 4,000 roses, 5,000

herbs and other foliage," she says. But without the capital to invest immediately, she let the business fall dormant while she returned to her old career, this time at Matalan, where after two years she'd pulled together a six-figure sum.

## WEDDING SEASON HAS BECOME AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT TIME IN SAM'S CALENDAR

### A FLOURISHING BUSINESS

Nine years on and The Traditional Flower Company is entering its eighth season. Having started life as one planted paddock at the back of Sam and Robin's farmhouse, it is now four fields of six acres, streaked with a palette of yellows, golds and pale pinks, through to the deepest velvety reds. Sam selected roses that would repeat-flower and have a second flush. David Austin's old-fashioned styles were the obvious choice for their shape and form, particularly classics such as 'Margaret Merrill' with its soft-white petals and yellow centre, and Sam's favourite, the raspberry-coloured 'Gertrude Jekyll': "It's my secret weapon," she says, "because it lifts everything it touches."

Sam admits she has been on a steep learning curve. In 2009, disaster struck when she and Robin found that the thousands-of-pounds-worth of tulips they'd also planted hated getting their feet wet in the clay soil. Fortunately, they solved the situation thanks to Robin's farming skills by using a potato ridger to help drain the land. "Another one of our mistakes was to put all our efforts into the flowers without thinking of the foliage, which made bouquets expensive," she says. "So now we have lady's mantle, dill, phlox and ten types of mint." In keeping with this natural style, the team also grows hedgerow flowers such as campion, hyssop, thistles and feverfew, while other beds spill over with pink and white cosmos, clouds of delicate love-in-a-mist from silver to blue and the mauves of larkspur. "I work with the seasons and use what is around me, so I harvest crab apples in autumn, and include fennel seed pods in Christmas arrangements," Sam explains. "I love cow parsley; in May I pick it by the bucketload. I take my secateurs everywhere with me."

Although Sam started out by selling at markets and online, wedding season





has become an important time in her calendar. “I was reluctant to do weddings initially, but now they’re my favourite part,” she admits. Brides are invited up to the farm before their big day to walk the flower fields, before sitting down to discuss ideas and mock up designs, from bouquets of antique pink roses with big blowsy wafts of dill and cow parsley to delicate posies, composed with such artful *laissez faire*, they could have been gathered on the ramble up to the church. In fact, her arrangements have won prestigious awards: despite feeling out of her depth when approached by the RHS to submit a design for its vintage marquee at Hampton Court Palace Flower Show in 2010, Sam was awarded a Silver Medal.

A pig barn on the farm has been converted into a workshop, where a blackboard on one wall is chalked up with the week’s daily rota, ranging from picking duties and website orders to running the new sister business, The Artisan Dried Flower Company.

## NATURAL RHYTHMS

Four years ago marked a milestone for Sam as she finally started to make a living from the company. She and Robin now earn a 50:50 wage from their joint ventures in farming and flowers. The cycles of the two businesses also have a natural synergy: the flowers dying down enough in late winter and early spring for Sam to help Robin with the lambing season; the dust settling on the long days and nights that this involves just in time for the flowers to kick-start again in April, and then it’s flat-out with seven-day working weeks and 12-hour days right through to the Christmas rush, after which the couple take a well-deserved four weeks off in January.

“I haven’t slowed down,” Sam says of her new life. “There’s so much uncertainty with growing. I’m obsessed with the weather because it dictates

## Balancing the business

All the research and planning in the world can’t completely prepare you for the realities of running a business. It doesn’t always run smoothly – who knew Sam Ellson’s tulips wouldn’t love the soil? Work hard on understanding the market and perfecting two or three sure-fire successes, which sell regularly, turn a profit and bring customers to your door. When you have created a market, a network of satisfied customers and an excellent reputation in your field, these central products sell themselves, and prop up your enterprise, leaving you free to grow the range and perfect the business.

everything we do: you can’t pick if it’s wet because the flowers bruise, so it’s not possible to plan ahead.” And just as there’s a right time for picking, there’s a right way to do so: “It’s quite an art,” Sam says. Some of her roses, such as ‘Molineux’, collapse unless picked while the petals are still tightly clasped; others such as ‘Sally Kane’ are better left until they’re more open. “Every one is different, and I’ve got to know mine very well,” Sam adds, as she stoops to cut a fragrant pink ‘Gertrude Jekyll’, glassy dew clinging to its petticoat-like layers of petals. “Although I’ve learned to delegate, I’m still the only one allowed to pick the roses.” ■

**i The Traditional Flower Company (0800 756 5403; [traditionalflower.co.uk](http://traditionalflower.co.uk)).**







## GARDENING

# GROWING A FUTURE

The owner of a beautiful garden centre in Devon explains how a passion for plants and a desire to set up on her own inspired her to make the leap

WORDS BY PAULA MCWATERS ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER



Staverton Bridge is one of the oldest of its kind in Devon and, once you have crossed the River Dart between its low medieval walls, you are only five minutes' walk from the nursery that bears its name. You can even arrive at Staverton by steam train via the South Devon Railway but, as the plants and vintage ephemera sold here by owner Steph Woolvett are rather tempting, it might be better to bring a car.

Beyond the hand-painted sign at the entrance, Steph has used her eye for design, honed during a seven-year career as a womenswear buyer for Boden, to create something different from the standard garden-centre offering. Aside from the large greenhouses and polytunnels where she grows her stock of herbs, perennials and flowering shrubs, you could almost feel as though you had stumbled into a private potager, with bay trees in galvanised pots, hazel bent into arches for runner beans, and raised beds brimming with vegetables and cottage-garden favourites.

"In my previous job, I learned the value of detail and quality, and that it's vital to listen to customers and find out what they really want," Steph ➞









says. “Now, I’m applying these same skills to my own business. Garden centres run the risk of being dull but they needn’t be. Plants can be displayed like a palette of paints – and that’s how I want to show them here.”

She recalls the day a friend took her to the stylish Petersham Nurseries in Richmond, Surrey, as a lightbulb moment. “My husband Dan and I had been thinking of launching our own company but, even though I had always loved gardening and my mum had run a nursery here for 22 years – I helped her sow seeds as a child – it hadn’t occurred to me to work in horticulture. Petersham made me see the business in a new way. I loved London but yearned to spend more time outdoors and to return to Devon. Suddenly, it seemed possible

to combine a long-held desire with being self-employed.”

## PLOTTING A PATH

Fortunately, Steph’s mother Mu wanted to downsize her four-and-a-half-acre plot, so Steph and Dan sold their London flat and bought two acres of it, including two greenhouses and two polytunnels. “Mum’s business was largely wholesale, so its appearance wasn’t important,” she says. “We took out a bank loan to finance the renovation and landscaping work needed to get it ready for the public.”

The result is an elegant but relaxed space, where alongside affordable plants is the café, built in 2010 from larch harvested nearby, with a sunny terrace overlooking the river. Here, customers can enjoy loose-leaf tea with





"A TYPICAL DAY SEES ME SOWING SEEDS, REPLENISHING STOCK, SERVING CUSTOMERS AND BALANCING ACCOUNTS"



a slice of homemade cake or a seasonal lunch of locally sourced produce and bread baked by Mu. "The café sustains our income during leaner months, and we are beginning to attract tourists, especially as we are so close to the South Devon railway," Steph explains.

Sadly, she and Dan separated in 2012, so Steph now runs Staverton Bridge with the help of one member of staff and calls in the occasional favour from family and friends: "It's been a challenge. A typical day sees me doing everything from sowing seeds, pruning, replenishing stock, planning and preparing menus to serving customers and balancing the accounts. But I'm determined not to give up."

In addition to the herbaceous perennials, shrubs, annuals and vegetable plants she grows in the polytunnels – and Mu's potted herbs – Steph buys bedding plants from a local wholesaler: "Initially I thought customers would want everything to be produced here but their feedback indicated they don't mind, as long as it's sustainable and British." Steph has also recently taken a part-time horticulture course at Bicton ➔





College and is providing her garden design tutor with space to run a planting design course where students can practise their skills, creating shop-window-style displays using Staverton Bridge's plants.

Despite Steph's best efforts to attract customers, trading hasn't always been helped by the weather. "My business is greatly affected by external factors, and the extended winter caused visitor numbers to drop considerably," she explains. "So I'm always looking for ways to make my assets work harder." Steph now does all the paperwork at home, enabling her to sub-let the office, and also offers a glasshouse as an events venue: "I love seeing the reaction of visitors coming to the nursery for the first time – hearing them go 'wow' is amazing." ■

**i** *Staverton Bridge Nursery (07866 561088; stavertonbridgenursery.com).*

## My path to success



### BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Being in charge of absolutely everything, from growing plants for the nursery to ordering ingredients for the café, as well as managing finances and generating publicity. I've had to learn to accept help and delegate, too.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU'D KNOWN BEFORE STARTING?

I hadn't appreciated how important social media could be in marketing a new business for free, and in helping to generate a wider customer base. I'm planning to go on a dedicated short course, run by Common Farm Flowers ([commonfarmflowers.com](http://commonfarmflowers.com)) to improve my skills in this area.

### FAVOURITE MOMENT?

So many people come back in the New Year and say how much they've missed us after

we close for six weeks over the winter.

### HOW DO YOU COMPETE WITH GARDEN CENTRES THAT ARE PART OF A CHAIN?

By offering something completely different – our peaceful, rural setting and our individuality are among our biggest selling points. People enjoy being here, whether they are browsing for plants or meeting up with friends in the café.

### BEST THING ABOUT RUNNING A GARDEN NURSERY?

I'm much healthier because I have the space to grow my own food and am more active. I also love having face-to-face interaction with customers.

### ADVICE TO OTHERS?

Visit other nurseries and identify what you want your unique selling point to be. Once you're up and running, listen to feedback and act on it.



# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

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## *garden nursery*

### WRITE A BUSINESS PLAN

**SIZING** Decide on the scale of your nursery. Will you start by opening your garden to the public and selling a few of your favourite plants? If this goes well, you could buy or rent some land, invest in greenhouses and polytunnels, then grow on a bigger scale and sell through farmers' markets or at plant fairs.

### YOUR NICHE

Think about which types of plants you would like to specialise in. This may relate to your personal interests, your expertise or, to an extent, your location. Research competition to find a gap in the market and where your business will fit in.

**ONLINE PRESENCE** Choose a domain name with key words incorporated into it that reflect your market, so it is easily picked up by search engines – for example, Long Acre Plants sells woodland and shade varieties at [plantsforshade.co.uk](http://plantsforshade.co.uk).

### GET SET TO LAUNCH

**QUALIFICATIONS** There are no minimum training requirements to become a gardener or run a nursery



but, obviously, the more knowledge you have beforehand, the easier it will be. Search 'careers advice and training' on The Gardeners Guild website ([thegardenersguild.co.uk](http://thegardenersguild.co.uk)), or browse Royal Horticultural Society courses at [rhs.org.uk/courses](http://rhs.org.uk/courses), and those administered by the Institute of Horticulture at [growcareers.info](http://growcareers.info).

### PLANNING PERMISSION

Whether you need this will depend on how much of your garden is to be devoted to the business, how sales

will be taken (online, on-site or a combination of both) and the opening times. Essentially, a local authority will want to know if your commercial nursery will become a disturbance to neighbours in the form of excess traffic and noise. Organise a free site visit for an individual assessment by contacting your local authority.

**FINANCES** Decide on the status of the company – will you be a sole trader, partnership or limited company? Budget your

first 12 months (allowing for costs such as premises, salary, stock, equipment, marketing and rates), and find an accountant via the Institute of Accountants in England and Wales ([icaew.com](http://icaew.com)) – ideally choose one with experience of working with nursery businesses such as yours. You will also need to ensure that you are sufficiently insured: public liability, professional indemnity and employers' liability insurance are essential for full protection.

### SPREAD THE WORD

**MARKETING** Invite the local press to cover your launch and use social media and word of mouth to publicise the business. Update your website regularly so customers can see news, learn about current stock and stay informed about new products and any events online.

**EXPANSION** Sell at any fairs in your area as well as national shows; then encourage repeat custom by getting visitors to subscribe to an e-newsletter, and use this to promote special discounts and offers.



A woman with brown hair, wearing a red and white patterned dress, is smiling and cutting flowers in a lush garden. She is surrounded by tall dahlias in various colors including deep red, purple, and orange. The background is a dense wall of green foliage.

GARDENING

# FLOWERING SUCCESS

When Tracey Mathieson began selling posies of flowers fresh from her cottage garden, the seeds of a flourishing business were sown – a green-minded florist shop full of vintage appeal

WORDS BY LOUISE ELLIOTT ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY CRISTIAN BARNETT





Tracey Mathieson makes the most of every waking moment in the long days of summer. She's up at dawn to gather flowers from her garden: snipping sweet peas from wooden wigwams, cutting rambling roses and trailing jasmine, as well as bunches of herbs, grasses and foliage. Then she has a few hours to make up the pretty posies and country arrangements that draw customers from far and wide to her shop, Foxtail Lilly, a converted timber barn in Oundle, Northamptonshire. "I need to pick early before the sun begins to

wilt the flowers so everything looks as fresh as possible," she explains. And, after a full day in the shop, she returns to her plot to tidy, water and plan the next cut before checking orders and, finally, heading to bed.

The shop, opposite the 18th-century cottage where Tracey lives with her husband Rick and children (Poppy, 19, currently at university, and Flynn, 16), is a stylish testament to the hard work she has put in since opening in June 2006. Old enamel jugs and tin buckets display her artistic arrangements, and wirework ➡





"PEOPLE LOVE TO SEE THE FLOWERS IN THE BEDS AND THEN BUY THEIR FAVOURITES IN THE SHOP"



baskets are filled with assorted bulbs, while outside plants and flowers line an old handcart and wooden shelving, tempting passing motorists to visit. Together with her beautiful home-grown flowers and plants, she also sells an ever-changing array of vintage finds – delicate floral china, weathered suitcases, decorative tins in fading colours, elegant green 1930s jugs and a range of handmade crafts, cards and papers. "When I decided to open the shop, I knew I needed something extra to carry the business through the year," Tracey says. "I also have to buy in additional plants and flowers, particularly in winter, but I source as many as possible from local or British suppliers."

### AN ORGANIC APPROACH

Like many good businesses, Foxtail Lilly has grown from small beginnings rather than being the result of a great leap into the unknown. The idea started 21 years ago when Tracey moved back to the family cottage after completing a degree in photography at the University of Nottingham, and working briefly as a photographer. She then found a job at a local herb farm and her love of gardening began: "I enrolled on an RHS class and looked after other people's gardens. Later on, I worked for Miriam Rothschild at Ashton Estate, where I learnt a lot about wild varieties."

Amazingly, she somehow also found the time and energy to transform her own garden: "It was basically wild at the front, with lots of brambles, and lawn and trees at the back." Inspired by a trip to Beth Chatto's dry garden in Essex, she decided to mix naturalistic

planting with her favourite cottage-garden plants, changing an area at a time to allow the scheme to evolve gradually. Now gravel paths weave their way around circular beds edged with brick, tall grasses bring structure, while herbs, lavenders and roses scent the air. In spring, there are hosts of miniature narcissi 'Thalia', black tulips and hardy annuals sown from seed in the autumn. In summer, her all-time favourite flower, the dahlia, emerges in dark purples and hot fiery hues, alongside pink and chocolate cosmos, purple penstemons and pink persicaria. "The challenge is to have enough to pick for the shop and still keep the garden looking good," Tracey explains.

Twelve years ago, she began dividing up plants from the garden and selling them outside the cottage, with bunches of sweet peas, snapdragons, old-fashioned roses and fragrant lavenders. Encouraged by the positive reaction to her hand-picked posies, she took a stall at Oundle farmers' market with her friend Sue Kirk, who sold woven willow sculptures. "People really seemed to like the combination of simple country flowers and crafts, and the idea of setting up a shop in the barn seemed a natural progression – we knew we had a loyal following," Tracey remembers.

### BRANCHING OUT

Aware that she would need more than the flowers from her garden to create a viable business, Tracey made trips to Newark antiques fair to hunt for vintage china, gardenalia, enamelware, small armoires, mirrors and cupboards, while she also networked with local craftspeople to source hand-sewn cushions, cards and rustic pieces. Her changing finds are displayed in the barn with the same flair for composition and colour demonstrated by her floral arrangements and the garden







outside. “Everything has to look natural, not regimented,” she says. Continuing the tradition of her grandparents, the shop remains essentially a family affair with husband Rick helping with deliveries and daughter Poppy serving – often selling her own lavender bags filled with flowerheads gathered from the garden.

On the edge of the historic market town of Oundle, the shop doesn’t get much passing trade but Tracey has determinedly spread the word from the outset. As well as handing out flyers at the farmers’ market and in the local area before the launch of Foxtail Lilly, she regularly opens her beautiful garden to intrigued visitors (“People love to see the flowers in the beds and then buy their favourites in the shop”) This year she also held a Midsummer’s Eve event for 75 people who enjoyed a meal in the barn accompanied by live folk music. Tracey is not just green-fingered – she is also green-minded: “All the cuttings and leaves from the flowers are composted and put back into the garden and our plastic wrap is biodegradable.” She also loves the idea of old pieces being used again, which is why she insists on authentic vintage, not vintage style, and as many original features as possible were retained or put to a new use during the barn conversion: “We kept the old panelling to make the counter – I don’t like to throw anything away.”

She might not have many free hours in a day but Tracey is still full of plans for Foxtail Lilly and is in the process of converting the ramshackle stables into a workshop in which she will prepare wedding flowers and run classes. “But I try not to let myself get too carried away. If I do, I just go out into the garden and get to work. It’s my passion for plants that drives everything I do.” ■

**Foxtail Lilly** (01832 274593;  
[foxtail-lilly.co.uk](http://foxtail-lilly.co.uk)).

## Creating a destination

With increasing amounts of leisure time available, people look for a destination that ticks different boxes: the opportunity to learn or see something new, to buy and to be entertained. To do this without running yourself ragged, you’ll

need to be clear about what the customer can experience and when. Your offering will be different from the competition, such as a large garden centre, and its success will rest on your personality and knowledge, so don’t be shy to shout about your

skills. A regular blog and newsletter is a great way to attract visitors from far and wide. Seasonal or occasional tours and talks will bring people in at specific times for a day out and hopefully back at other times (or online) to make purchases.



## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE #4:

# *Devising an operational plan*

### **IF THERE IS ONE PART OF STARTING A BUSINESS THAT PUTS PEOPLE OFF, IT'S THE LOGISTICAL SIDE.**

It sounds so clinical, precise and corporate; just the thing that you wanted to avoid when planning a start-up. But it really is very simple and getting it right in the early stages will save you headaches and heartaches later on. Simply put, the operational plan is the nuts and bolts of your business.

### **YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE BEGINS MANY MONTHS BEFORE IT REACHES THE CUSTOMER:**

the offering and its supply must be consistent by the time you launch. It needs to be available when they want it, easy to purchase and serve the purpose. You might want to start with a mind map (or at least a big piece of paper and some coloured pens). Begin at the end, with the happy customer walking away with their package or sitting in the training course, then work backwards. Consider the following:

### **HOW WILL THEY PAY ME?**

You should offer as many options as possible, even staged payments for expensive items or invoicing. Don't let the physical payment be a barrier to sale – speak to your bank about taking card payments or see *izettle.com* for details about a new and considerably cheaper transaction service for small businesses. Make sure you have terms and conditions of sale visible – do you take returns? What if customers have a complaint? This doesn't have to be very complicated, just clear.

### **WHO WILL SELL TO THEM?**

It goes without saying that if you are dealing with customers directly, you will be friendly, helpful and engaging. If not, make sure you choose the right people and outlets to do this – they represent you and your product. Ensure staff understand the customer-service policy (smile, be nice, listen and respond promptly is often enough). Hold short training sessions – this doesn't have to be formal; simple role play can help staff understand and feel confident when dealing

with difficult situations. Offer incentives for outlets to increase profit and encourage customers to give feedback.

### **WHERE WILL THEY PURCHASE?**

All your marketing is geared towards helping the customer find their way to your business and spending money with you. Think creatively about all the places your product (or information about it) could be and, above all, make sure that customers know exactly where to go to buy your product – the more places, the better. Be consistent about where the product is and when, with plenty of stock available; otherwise customers will be frustrated. If you are selling online, make every step clear and pleasurable, from great product pictures and a straightforward returns policy to speedy delivery. Firms now offer a parcel-tracking service, which takes the guesswork out of delivery and improves customer experience.

**WHAT WILL CUSTOMERS WALK OUT OF THE DOOR WITH?** Don't overlook this final and vital stage – customers want to feel pleased about their purchase and know that they made the right decision. Depending on your product or service, hand-wrapping, lovely bags, follow-up action pack and social media acknowledgement all contribute to their sense of satisfaction. Devise ways to keep in touch after the sale as well – loyal, returning customers are your biggest asset.





**W** **HO WILL MAKE MY OFFERING?** How your items are created depends on what they are and how many you think you can sell. If you are producing yourself, you are limited by your own time – make it clear to your outlets that supply may be limited. To sell in volume, you'll need to outsource, but shop around. It's important to have a good relationship with suppliers. Choose a firm that values quality and service, and ask for examples of its work. Understand its terms and conditions, delivery times and payment terms. Order the right quantity, scheduled to coincide with busy periods. Find a flexible manufacturer; smaller quantities may be more expensive but allow you to test the market. If overseas, be prepared for a less smooth ride. All products need to comply with labelling and contents regulations.

If you are selling your products wholesale to shops and other outlets, you should have a simple procedure for ordering, delivery, payment and, again, terms and conditions. Supply plenty

of point-of-sale material and make time to speak regularly to them; they are your customers, they need to understand everything about the product in order to sell it on your behalf.

## FINE-TUNING FOR PROFIT

**EXAMINE THE VALUE CHAIN** Ask yourself if you can add to the product or service or cut costs at each stage of the journey – this will improve your profit. For example, if you sell direct to customers at a farmers' market, you may get more for your product because you are adding the value instead of the shop – but you'll have to pay for your stand, travel, wrapping and time (when you could, perhaps, be producing). Are there other changes you can make to the chain that add to your offering more than they cost so you can increase your profit?

**THINK OF THE OPERATIONAL PLAN AS THE JOURNEY FROM YOUR FLASH OF INSPIRATION TO THE HAPPY, SATISFIED CUSTOMER.** Each of these points along the way requires an action from you and it will be virtually the same for each sale – with a plan in place, the process just works, leaving you free to make and sell.

### RESOURCES:

- [gov.uk/browse/business/sale-goods-services-data](http://gov.uk/browse/business/sale-goods-services-data)
- [lawdonut.co.uk/law/contracts-disputes/business-contracts](http://lawdonut.co.uk/law/contracts-disputes/business-contracts)
- [makeitbritish.co.uk](http://makeitbritish.co.uk)
- [alibaba.com](http://alibaba.com)

ARE THERE CHANGES YOU CAN MAKE TO THE CHAIN THAT ADD VALUE MORE THAN THEY COST?





GARDENING

# A FEAST OF FLOWERS

At her idyllic home in rural Wales, Sarah Hughes is earning a living from the delicate art of preserving edible flora, using natural ingredients and time-honoured techniques

WORDS BY EMMA PRITCHARD ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD GADSBY



In Denbighshire's Dee Valley, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Site of Special Scientific Interest, with its steep slopes sculpted by glaciers and the Berwyn Mountains providing a dramatic backdrop, you'll find an oasis of colour and delicate flora. Here, indigo violas and butter-yellow cowslips flourish, then blue cornflowers, snowy apple blossom and magenta pea flowers come into bloom, while honey bees savour the abundant sweet-tasting forage. But it's not only the wildlife that enjoys the bounty of this idyllic space. As Sarah Hughes picks a number of heart-shaped petals from a bush of dog roses and places them in her basket, she pauses and surveys her garden – the headquarters of her crystallised flower business, Eat My Flowers. "I can't help smiling when I stop to admire the view," she says. "I have to remind myself that I'm actually at work."

For Sarah, a trained agronomist, who later pursued a career in marketing before being made redundant in 2010, it provides a welcome change to her previous two-hour commute to other parts of North Wales: "Now I just step outside my front door."

### GATHERING INSPIRATION

Despite a long-held interest in wild flowers and horticulture – "I used to grow lettuces and press flowers in the school holidays" – Sarah didn't come up with the idea for Eat My Flowers straightaway. "After being employed for so long, and having two small children [Thomas and William, then aged five and four], I knew I wanted to run my own business. I originally intended to launch a range of children's clothing," she says. "But the start-up costs were huge."

That's where her husband Philip came in. As well as helping to run the family farm (his father rears cattle and sheep), he is also a resident agent for the neighbouring Rhug Estate, a job ➡











that often takes him to London to showcase its organic meat to Michelin-starred restaurants and boutique hotels. “We became aware that edible flowers and foraged ingredients were becoming really fashionable,” Sarah says. “I had the space and skills to grow my own here but, because such plants have a short shelf life, and we live in a remote area, I was struggling to see how I could make the business work. Then, one day, I was making a cake for a friend and, instead of icing it, I decorated it with crystallised flowers. Something just clicked.”

### A BLOOMING BUSINESS

As caster sugar and unpasteurised egg white were all she needed in addition to homegrown flowers, Sarah set up her business using £1,000 of savings. She created a basic website, then went with Philip to London where they met David Trumper, manager of Jane Asher Party Cakes, who was so impressed that he offered to pass samples to his celebrity connections. “That was a real turning point for me,” Sarah says. “Rose Prince used them for an Easter baking feature in *The Telegraph*; the next day, my answering machine was full of orders.”

With a limited supply of flowers in her garden, she gathered blooms from



“I USED TO COLLECT BASKETFULS AT A TIME BUT I DISCOVERED THE END RESULT WAS BETTER IF YOU PRESERVE THE FLOWERS WITHIN TWO HOURS OF PICKING”

the farm’s hedgerows, before filling every windowsill in her house with potted plants. Finally, in the summer of 2012, six weeks after launching – and thanks to a start-up grant from Welsh Government Support – she was able to invest in a 40-foot polytunnel, where she now cultivates the majority of the violas and pom pom (bellis) daisies that make up the bulk of her orders. “It’s easier to grow consistently under cover,” Sarah says. “I don’t have to worry about pests, soil contamination or disease and, because I’ve had the plants tested by a specialist food laboratory, they’re bacteria-free and safe for



consumption.” To meet peak demand, Sarah orders plug plants from horticultural specialists Thompson & Morgan in January and brings them to flower early in the warmth of her outside growing space. She ensures they continue to flourish into summer by dead-heading them daily and giving them the occasional organic feed.

Today, Sarah is gathering blooms to complete a wedding order, brides-to-be now her principal customers. In addition to the daisies and violas, she also collects dog-rose petals, before taking them into her 19th-century farmhouse kitchen for the crystallisation. “I used to collect basketfuls at a time,” Sarah says, laying her floral harvest on the table, next to a silver dessertspoon, artist’s paintbrush and glass dishes containing her key ingredients. “But, through trial and error, I discovered the end result is better if you preserve the flowers within two hours of picking, when the petals are still plump.”

First, Sarah whisks the unpasteurised egg white, which she uses to glaze each petal, stamen and stigma, and then sprinkles over the sugar. The sparkling flowers are left to dry naturally for 12 hours before being carefully boxed up and sent out via Royal Mail. “When ➞



it's busy, I'll make around 500 a day," she says. Although, once crystallised, Sarah's flowers will last up to six months, to ensure business continues through the year and to appeal to a wider market, she has created a range of flavoured lollipops, with a flower set in each one. "I took a sample to Harrods and they placed an order for 1,200!" Sarah says. "Now I supply Fortnum & Mason, Fenwick and my local farm shop." Both these and the crystallised flowers have won Great Taste Awards. With demand rising, Sarah is now

outgrowing her kitchen table. "I'm in the process of converting one of our barns into a dedicated workspace," she says. The green-fingered entrepreneur is hoping to add new varieties, too, plus she has developed a bespoke wedding range with celebrity baker Fiona Cairns: "I can't believe I'm making a living doing something I love. What could be better than spending every day surrounded by flowers?" ■

 *Eat My Flowers (01490 412039; [eatmyflowers.co.uk](http://eatmyflowers.co.uk)).*



## Simple ways to expand



Most small businesses turn over a good profit within the business-to-customer model. This means you make or repackage a product and sell direct (online and retail outlets included). But you can grow your business and extend your reach by adopting a different approach; one where you sell your products to someone else and they incorporate them into theirs. Like Sarah of Eat My Flowers, you could increase turnover and have greater exposure, even if your name isn't always on the label. Sarah's business perhaps has the best plan: a mixture of both methods. This way, an entrepreneur can maintain a relationship with customers and increase national market reach. Research companies that might have a use for your product – those with which your enterprise has a natural affinity. Work on your proposition and be clear about how your product is a good match and will enhance theirs. Be innovative about how you approach businesses; you need to stand out – send beautifully wrapped samples, for example.



"I TOOK A SAMPLE OF  
MY FLOWER LOLLIPOPS  
TO HARRODS AND  
THEY PLACED AN  
ORDER FOR 1,200"





A photograph of three women standing in front of a large, round hay bale. The woman on the left is sitting on the hay bale, wearing a red top and a blue skirt. The woman in the middle is standing next to a wooden ladder, wearing a grey top and a brown apron. The woman on the right is standing, wearing a blue vest over a patterned top and grey trousers. A black dog is sitting on the grass in front of the woman on the right. There are several potted plants with white and yellow flowers in the foreground. The background is a dark, corrugated metal wall.

GARDENING

# A CUT ABOVE

Three women in Cornwall have cultivated a burgeoning enterprise, creating stunning floral arrangements using their homegrown blooms

WORDS BY SUE HERDMAN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY JASON INGRAM

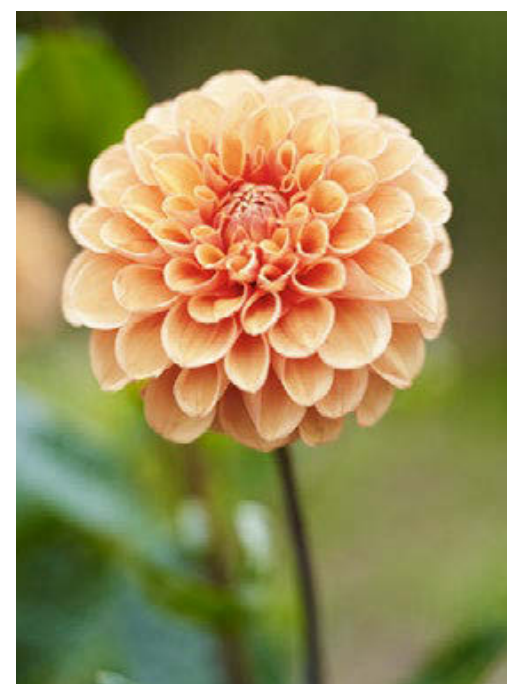


**O**n a swell of hill at Trezare Farm near Fowey in south Cornwall, you'll find Marion Parish, Penny Dunn and her daughter Becca Stuart – founders of The Garden Gate Flower Company – busy tending the crops in their beautiful cutting garden with views of the sea. Hydrangeas, veronica and sweet peas are all in bloom, soon to be joined by snapdragons, cosmos and jasmine, which the women will gather and combine to form the hand-tied bouquets and relaxed floral arrangements that are the essence of their business.

“The idea for a cutting garden had been in my head for some time,” says Marion, who, three years ago, was juggling PhD studies with caring for her two children, and used gardening as a way to switch off. “The ‘slow food’ movement was really popular, so I wondered if there could be a niche for ‘slow flowers’ – British species, organically and seasonally grown.” She discussed the idea with Becca, a friend and fellow mother, who had been running a curtain-making company by herself but disliked working alone. She shared Marion’s love of horticulture and also dreamed of turning it into a business. It wasn’t long before Becca’s green-fingered mother Penny was involved, too. “She and her husband Chris run an organic farm, where they raise sheep and grow arable crops. When they offered us the use of a one-acre paddock, we had an exciting ‘let’s do it’ moment,” Marion explains.

### MAKING ARRANGEMENTS

They drew up a business and planting plan and, in April 2012, with the help of their husbands, began mowing and rotavating the plot. Two months later, the first seeds were sown, sourced from, among others, Tamar Organics and Jekka’s Herb Farm. “It was hard manual labour,” Marion recalls. “We did the weeding entirely by hand, but we didn’t mind because we were



working towards our own venture. We sowed as much organic seed as we could find, but, due to our organic status, we had to get permission for varieties that were only available in non-organic form, which resulted in delays – even today that can be a lengthy process.”

As with many new businesses, money was tight: “We got a £500 family loan and upcycled where possible,” Becca says. “We didn’t know what would grow best, so chose according to our situation and soil type, trialling smaller quantities and sowing every couple of weeks to ensure a staggered harvest.” Their first season was a triumph – by July, many flowers were ready to cut, a





polytunnel had been requisitioned to grow delicate types such as peonies and 'Paper White' narcissi, a website was designed by a family friend, and stone-built former stables were turned into a workshop, where they run courses.

### CELEBRATION TIME

"We originally intended to sell by mail order and at local nurseries," Marion explains, "but weddings have become a large part of the business." The women now supply blooms for about 28 celebrations each year. Setting themselves apart from the competition, The Garden Gate Flower Company encourages brides to visit the cutting garden and, over tea and Penny's homemade cake, discuss their ideas before seeing where the flowers are grown. "Designing for weddings allows us to be more creative," Becca says. As you watch them skilfully arranging posies, it's hard to believe that none have had professional training – something they believe works to their advantage. "We wanted to create loose-looking bouquets, working with what the plot can give us that day and using seed heads and native hedgerow plants," Marion says. Also joining the team, once a week, is the first employee, Mark, and, in summer, a floristry student, who volunteers to help with the picking.

The element of surprise is one they came to love, as well as the flexibility of self-employment, which enables them to combine a career with their families. As Marion tucks a sprig of mint into her latest creation, she reveals another secret to their success: "Always combine plants that grow together in the wild – such as blackberries and evergreen honeysuckle – in your displays," she says. "If found together in nature, they'll look beautiful in an arrangement and have that individual feel we are always striving for." ■

**i** *The Garden Gate Flower Company*  
([thegardengateflowercompany.co.uk](http://thegardengateflowercompany.co.uk)).

## Our path to success



### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Delivery. Many couriers don't take 'perishables', and none will guarantee their arrival. When orders go awry, it can be upsetting because flowers are often ordered for special occasions. We decided that it was much safer to distribute the bouquets ourselves.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU'D KNOWN BEFORE STARTING?

Time is money. To help manage our workload, we've come up with lower-cost alternatives such as providing 'DIY buckets' of flowers for brides so they can create their own displays.

### WHAT HAS BEEN A HIGHLIGHT SO FAR?

Early on, we were commissioned to design arrangements for a big wedding being held at a nearby stately home. It gave us the chance to be adventurous and is a

project we feel proud to show to future brides. We also received the Cornwall Sustainability Award for Best New Business 2013.

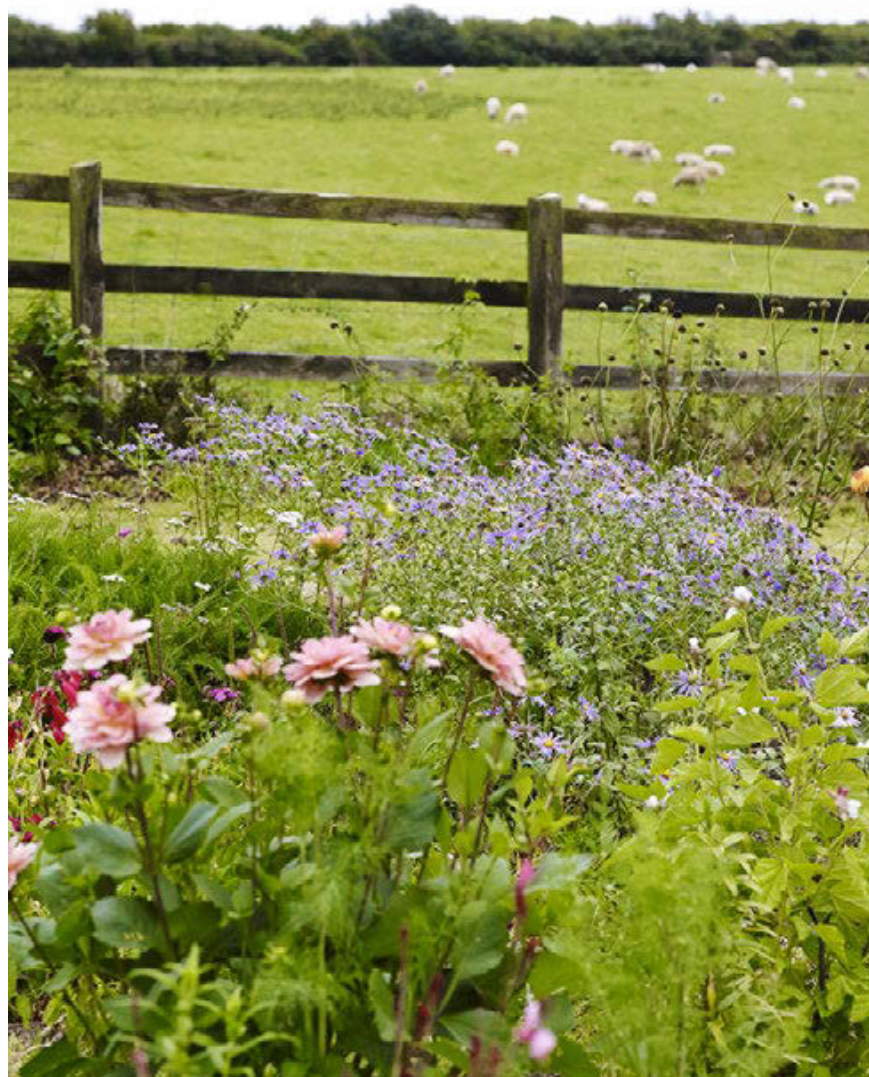
### WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT YOUR JOB?

No two days are the same and, four times a year, as the season shifts, our work changes, too. Planting hundreds of bulbs in cold December conditions can be hard but when you pick perfect flowers in spring, it makes it all worthwhile.

### DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR OTHERS WHO WOULD LIKE TO DO THE SAME THING?

Adapt to your environment. Visit local gardens to see what they are growing – that will inform your choices – and buy from tabletop sales, farmers' markets and garden gates. For free plant advice, join Twitter and take part in the #Britishflowers Tweetchat on Mondays from 8-9pm.





"WE WANTED TO GET AWAY FROM RIGID DESIGNS AND INSTEAD CREATE MORE NATURAL, LOOSE-LOOKING BOUQUETS"



GARDENING

"WE CAN NEVER RECREATE  
WHAT HAS BEEN MADE  
BEFORE BECAUSE WE WORK  
WITH WHAT THE GARDEN  
GIVES US THAT DAY"

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# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

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## *cut-flower seller*

### FIRST STEPS

**DO YOUR RESEARCH** Use Facebook and Twitter to find out about your potential customers – how often do they buy flowers and how much do they spend?

Create surveys to send out, too, on [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com).

**DIY** Selling, as well as growing, your own flowers will cut out the retailer so profits could be higher. You may, however, have a more limited seasonal supply. Make sure you understand the planting calendar to maximise your output and think of ways to generate a consistent income in quieter months such as selling dried varieties or related gardening items.

**FIND A UNIQUE ROUTE TO MARKET** Weddings are an obvious choice, but it's also a crowded industry. Offices need fresh arrangements in their reception areas, which presents you with a good opportunity to publicise your work to a wider audience.

**NETWORK** Make contact with people who might need (or know someone who needs) flowers: wedding and funeral planners, caterers, stylists and so on.

**DEVELOP YOUR STORY** Try donating end-of-life flowers to charities, churches or even taking them to schools

near you – then publicise your good deed via social media and the local press.

### DEVELOP THE BUSINESS

#### **STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD**

Offer the customer something they can't get in the supermarket, as you won't be able to compete on price: great service, unusual flower varieties, a PYO option or local delivery.

**MEET DEMAND** If you don't have space to cultivate as many different types of flowers as you need, negotiate contra-deals with other growers.

**GET YOURSELF KNOWN** Use social media – it's free marketing and a great way to connect with others in the industry.

**FOCUS ON YOUR STRENGTHS** Don't risk quality by having a finger in too many pies – specialise in a couple of areas you enjoy.

**PLAN AHEAD** Winter months are the toughest: polytunnels can 'stretch' the season; consider buying from parts of Britain with a milder climate; try drying flowers such as helichrysum, lavender and hydrangeas; and be creative with seed heads, berries and evergreen



foliage. For more advice, visit [thebritishflowercollective.com](http://thebritishflowercollective.com).

### HONE YOUR TALENT

Whether you want to start a business or develop a skill, there's a course for you...

**SARAH RAVEN'S GARDEN AND COOKERY SCHOOL, BRIGHTLING, EAST SUSSEX** Learn the principles of growing cut-and-come-again flowers from the expert herself, and then pick up tips over lunch in her Perch Hill garden (0845 092 0283; [sarahraven.com](http://sarahraven.com)).

**HUMBLE BY NATURE, PENALT, MONMOUTHSHIRE** In the pretty Wye Valley setting of Kate Humble's mixed farm, let florist Catherine Gray show you how to

create wedding arrangements using British cut flowers (01600 714595; [humblebynature.com](http://humblebynature.com)).

**CATKIN, DODDINGTON, LINCOLNSHIRE** Dr Rachel Petheram, a tutor at RHS Harlow Carr, explains how to establish a perfect cutting garden, creates starter kits

and demonstrates the art of hand-tied bouquets (01400 272344; [catkinflowers.co.uk](http://catkinflowers.co.uk)).

**THE GARDEN GATE FLOWER COMPANY, CORNWALL** See previous page.





## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE #5:

# *Creating a marketing strategy*

**MARKETING MIGHT SEEM LIKE A WALK IN THE PARK AFTER YOUR BUSINESS PLAN AND SEEMINGLY GRITTIER TOPICS.** In reality, it's a lot tougher than you think, especially for a small business struggling to stay within a budget but aiming to reach as many customers as possible. To make the best of your chances, know exactly what your product is, who your customers are and why they buy it, and then use your skills to direct them towards you. Your marketing needs to be right for you and your product, and it all starts with market research.

**WHO ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS GOING TO BE?** You will, of course, have an instinctive idea, but there are more potential ones than you think; for example, the happy couple usually buy the wedding cake but also it might be the parents, bridesmaids or work colleagues. Pay special attention to regional variations and changes in fashion, and keep an eye

on emerging trends – look at *trendhunter.com*, follow blogs for your sector and set up some Pinterest boards – keeping tabs on people with similar interests means you can develop a real insight into what people like.

**HOW MANY ARE THERE?** Use some simple statistics to get a quick view of what's called 'the addressable market', ie potential customers. Look at

trade magazines, industry reports, local trends and online forums. Break down the information by region, gender or income depending on who you target. Obviously not all of them will become your customers but you will get an idea of the size of the market.

**WHAT DO THEY BUY AND WHY?** This is about understanding what your potential

customers are doing now and how they make the decision to buy from the current suppliers. You need to get under the skin of your competition, understanding its product and the customer experience – it will help your marketing to differentiate. Do some comparative or even secret shopping, visit shows and fairs, read testimonials and, if possible, talk to potential customers.

**NOW IT'S TIME TO TEST THE MARKET.** You need to find out if your product or service will work – this is not product testing (you should have perfected your product already); market testing is much more about how people will buy a product or service and how much they are willing to pay for it.

**FIND AN APPROPRIATE AND LOW-COST 'ROUTE TO MARKET'.** This is where your customers will buy your product. To understand if you can make a profit, you need to know how much they will pay.

**SOME OF THESE QUESTIONS CAN BE ANSWERED AT THE COMPUTER SCREEN, but nothing replaces meeting people face to face.** Try written questionnaires at the school gate or in local magazines and social media (Twitter is especially useful here). Talk to a broad range of people to avoid a 'sample bias' – if you don't cast your net wide, you might end up jumping to the wrong conclusion. There are basically two categories of questions: technical (Where did you get it? How did you find a supplier? Where else did you look? How much did it cost?); and emotional (Why did you choose that one? Are you happy with your choice? What is good or bad about the transaction?).



# KNOW YOUR MARKET

**RESEARCH DEMONSTRATES AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMPETITION**, trends and, crucially, customers – where they buy, how much they pay and what they want. Now it's time to set out your plan for how to find customers and persuade them to buy. For a marketing plan template and expert advice, see [marketingdonut.co.uk](http://marketingdonut.co.uk).

## IT IS ABSOLUTELY CRUCIAL TO DIFFERENTIATE YOURSELF

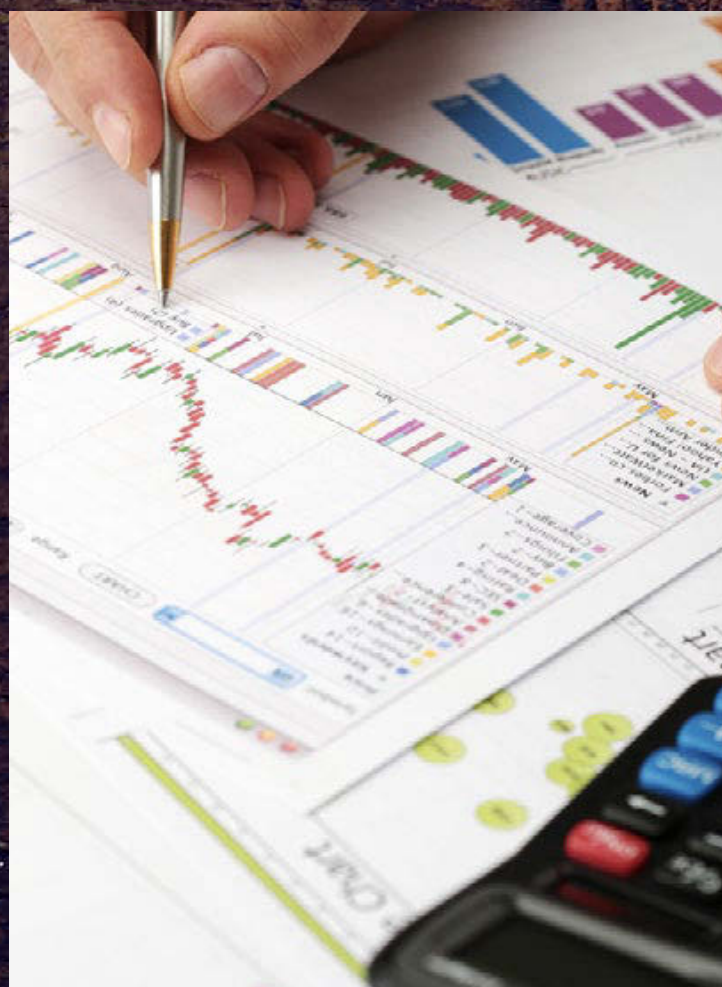
Ask yourself why a customer will buy from you rather than the competition. Unless you have a brand-new product, you will have to make it very clear why you are different. If your unique selling point is not obvious, look back at your research and unpick what people said was important – local sourcing, personal service, fast turnaround or choice of colours, for example, and use this as the key to a sale.

**COMMIT TO MARKETING OBJECTIVES** How much do you expect to take each day, what would an average customer spend, and how many enquiries or browses do you need to convert to a sale? Sometimes you can reach your targets by simply doing more – another day at the market or a customer incentive to buy additional items. You have to box a bit smarter and use on-going research and conversations with customers to devise new strategies. Marketing is a way of helping to achieve your targets. Always keep a record of activity (from an advert to half an hour on Twitter) and monitor what resulted in more sales.

**CALCULATE YOUR BUDGET** Know how you think you can best use your limited funds for marketing, and specifically how each activity boosts your objectives. Be strict about monitoring activity to ensure you don't spend time and money on those that are not effective. Be careful to calculate the opportunity cost – Pinterest is not free, as you always spend longer than anticipated when you could be producing more stock. Work on your word-of-mouth marketing; happy customers telling other people is one of the best and cheapest ways to create new sales.

## ANY NEW BUSINESS SHOULD LOOK CAREFULLY AT THE MARKETING OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Not only is it cost effective, it is a way to address a wider market. Find out which platform your potential



customers are using – some will be a better fit than others – then concentrate your activity there. Try not to use social media to make an obvious sales pitch – platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn) are social, meaning that customers are there to connect, communicate and understand. The best social marketers tell a story. Understand that this will not necessarily result in an immediate sale but it will raise awareness and the next time a potential customer is looking for your product, they already know, like and trust you. To discover more about social media marketing, visit [theengagingbrand.com](http://theengagingbrand.com).

ASK YOURSELF WHY A CUSTOMER  
WILL BUY FROM YOU RATHER THAN  
THE COMPETITION – MAKE IT CLEAR  
WHY YOU ARE DIFFERENT



# Hunt or gather

Use your passion for collecting pieces from the past to launch a start-up with vintage appeal





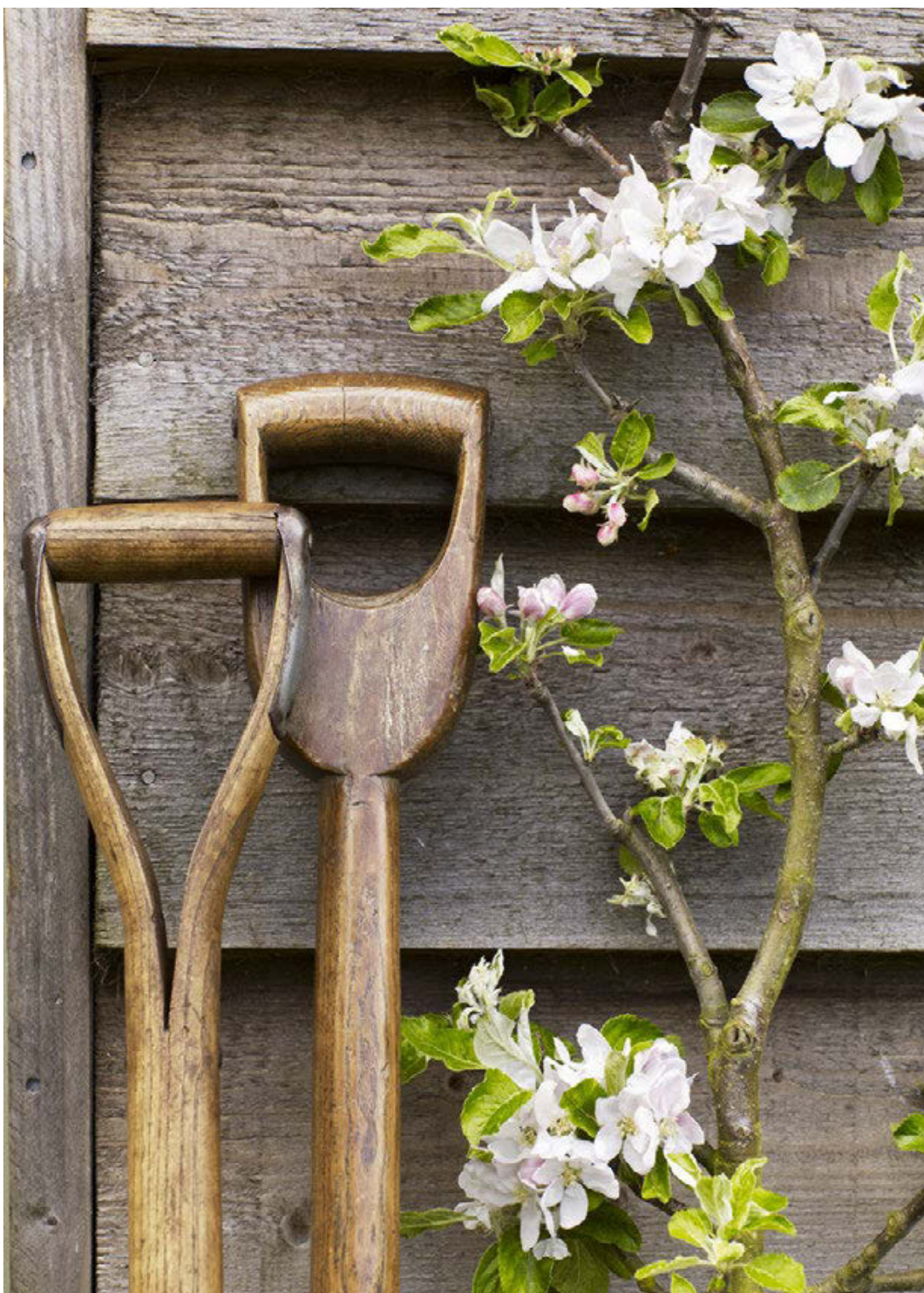


COLLECTING

# GLORIOUS GARDENALIA

An Oxfordshire couple with a love of old horticultural items have built a business faithfully bringing new life to time-worn tools, furniture and ephemera

WORDS BY **PAULA McWATERS** ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY **ANDREW MONTGOMERY**



Piers Newth's Oxfordshire workshop smells of wax polish, wood shavings, hot metal and fresh paint. On the bench is a much-loved 1930s border fork with a broken handle, which he is skilfully restoring by splicing new wood into the old and burnishing the slender metal tines until they gleam. Soon it will join the ranks of beautifully renovated tools in the summerhouse just across the garden: spades, trowels, hoes, loppers, shears, pruners and more, each one meticulously catalogued and priced by Piers's partner, Louise Allen.

The variety in their current collection is staggering, from everyday equipment to specialist pieces: an elegant, long-handled French flower picker that cuts and holds blooms; an asparagus buncher; an alarmingly named Spearwell Slasher; a Gentleman's Dandy Weeder and even a glass cucumber straightener. Alongside these are seed packets, vintage gardening books and catalogues, harvesting baskets, cloches, sieves and buckets, garden tables, chairs, plant stands and other treasures from the past.

Piers and Louise run Garden & Wood – a vintage garden tool, furniture and ephemera business



– from their home, Dreamers Cottage, on the village green in Little Haseley near Oxford. Stock is sourced throughout the year but especially in winter, when affordable pieces are easier to find at auctions, trade fairs and markets. “We rarely go anywhere without working out whether we can buy some antique tools en route,” Louise says.

### A MEETING OF MINDS

By setting up their business, she and Piers are not only able to pursue three of their passions – gardening, sustainable living and antiques – but can use their 25 years of experience in professional horticulture. The couple met in their teens at the RHS garden



PIERS AND LOUISE SET THEMSELVES A GOAL TO LEAVE THEIR JOBS FOR NEW ADVENTURES WHEN THE TIME WAS RIGHT



at Wisley in Surrey, where Piers had started as a grass cutter before moving into arboriculture, while Louise was taking the Wisley Certificate – a practical and traditional course for aspiring gardeners. After studying for a Kew Diploma (a high-level qualification to train people to work in botanic gardens around the world), Louise moved to Oxford Botanic Garden and Harcourt Arboretum as the first education officer, and then she and Piers – who joined her five years later as arboretum foreman – advanced up the ladder to become its curators.

Although they both enjoyed their jobs, they had set themselves a goal to leave for new adventures when the time was right, working hard to pay off their mortgage so they would be free to do so. “Piers always said, ‘Something will come up’ and it did,” Louise says. “On a trip to Herefordshire in 2008, ↻





he bought a few tools in an antiques shop and we were blown away by their quality.” They decided to look out for more and see where it took them. “We thought, worst case scenario, we’ll end up with a great toolshed ourselves,” Piers recalls. He used his considerable skills to nurse them all back to full working order, having had a talent for such practical tasks since childhood. After a few months, the couple had accumulated around 200 items – enough to sell – and in June 2009 they took time off work to run a stand at Cottesbrooke Gardeners’ Fair. “The response was tremendous. So the following year we did the RHS Chelsea Flower Show and that was that,” Louise says. “We handed in our notices to focus on our new venture full-time.”

### OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Keen gardeners and collectors alike now snap up the finds. The couple sell ➡

## Where to find vintage garden items



Consider starting with relatives or friends and ask if you can tidy their sheds in exchange for gleaning any interesting pieces that are no longer used – sometimes people just haven’t got around to having a clear-out. Try not to dismiss items you don’t like too quickly; remember that your business is about selling to others, not collecting for yourself – beauty is always in the eye of the beholder.

The countrywide International Art & Collectors’ Fairs ([iacf.co.uk](http://iacf.co.uk)) are the largest events of their kind in Britain and are a hunting ground for trade buyers such as yourself.

Fleamarkets and country house auctions

(search the internet for your nearest events) can provide rich pickings as could online marketplaces such as [ebay.co.uk](http://ebay.co.uk) and [gumtree.com](http://gumtree.com), too.

Don’t dismiss table-top sales and the Community Recycling Centre as a source of stock – you will be surprised at what is disposed of. For the ultimate guide to desirable horticultural items, see Sally Coulthard’s books *Gardenalia* (available secondhand) and *Shed Decor* (Jacqui Small, £25).

Most importantly, though, ensure your magpie instincts don’t take up all your time. You need to concentrate on the business of earning a living, too, so devote only a set amount of time to collecting.



SUTTON'S SEEDS

IN USE  
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD  
SUTTON & SONS, READING, ENGLAND.

DESPITE THE NOSTALGIC  
QUALITY OF THEIR STOCK,  
THE COUPLE HAVE EMBRACED  
NEW TECHNOLOGY WITH  
AN ONLINE SHOP

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"THE MENTALITY OF  
EARLIER TIMES WAS  
TO RETAIN AND REPAIR –  
AND THAT APPROACH  
GUIDES OUR BUSINESS"

by mail order, via the online shop that Louise has created and, during spring and summer, they take to the road, going to select garden shows, including Chelsea in London, Courson in Paris, Hex in Belgium and later at The Chelsea Physic Garden Christmas Fair.

They are effusive about the quality of the items they sell. "In the past, people were better versed in using tools from a young age than they are now, so the pieces didn't have to be over-engineered in order to stand up to misuse," Piers says. "In a 1930s catalogue, for instance, the selection would start with a boy's spade with a D-shaped or T-shaped handle and go up to a full-size spade, with a straight or tapered handle – and they all came in varying lengths to suit. At the shows, we encourage customers to pick up the tools and try them out."

### A CRAFTSMAN AT WORK

Piers prefers to conserve rather than restore if he can. "Going at a tool with an angle grinder is the worst thing you can do: you might remove the rust but you will also take off a proportion of the metal, which ruins it," he says. "Often the tools have attained a better working shape over time. We tell customers to keep using them because the abrasive action of the soil is good for the metal. The mentality of the earlier times was to retain and repair – that appeals to us in all we do."

When Piers and Louise are not running the business, they are busy tending their garden, which now

supplies more than 75 per cent of their fruit and vegetables, on one third of an acre. "We grow what we like to eat, including borlotti beans, potatoes, onions, cabbage, sprouts, kale, carrots, raspberries, blackcurrants and gooseberries. I'm keen to have enough home-grown produce to keep us going through winter," Louise says.

In another part of the garden, a shepherd's hut, restored by Piers, has been converted into a showroom and Louise has decorated its painted walls with racks of illustrated seed packets and vintage advertisements, relishing

the creative side of 'setting out their stall'. Now Garden & Wood has become better known, customers can shop online or make an appointment to visit and buy – or to sell. "If someone has inherited tools they can't use, they're glad to see them go to a good home," Piers says. "If we know a tool's history or the name of its previous owner, we pass that on to whoever buys it. It's lovely to have that continuity if something has been appreciated over the years." ■

**G** Garden & Wood (01844 279170; [gardenandwood.co.uk](http://gardenandwood.co.uk)).







Small hand  
for children, hand  
nice quality  
22-4-18

with face



COLLECTING

# THE VINTAGE HUNTER

Sussex-based Sarah Kingston has turned a passion for finding pieces from the past into a rewarding way of earning a living in the countryside

WORDS BY EMMA PRITCHARD ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLAIRE RICHARDSON

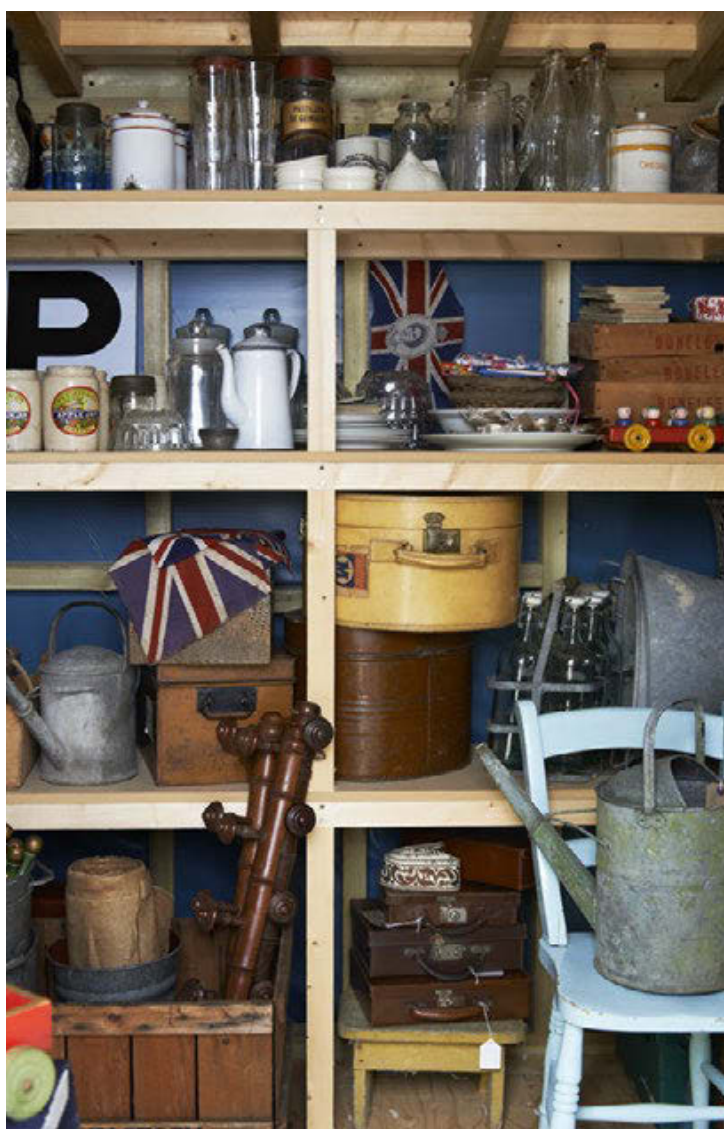
W eaving among the crowds, browsing a village brocante in the heart of the French countryside, vintage-hunter Sarah Kingston appears to have a rather enviable working routine. She and her husband Paul will load her finds into a VW Transporter before bringing them across the Channel to their seaside home in Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, to be restored, if necessary, and sold, either via their website or at shows around the UK.

“That side of my job is pretty idyllic,” says Sarah, now sitting on a 1930s leather sofa at home, surrounded by an array of antique treasures, the result of a life-long passion and habit for hoarding the unique and original. “But what people perhaps don’t appreciate is the hard work that goes into finding that perfect piece. In France, markets sprawl throughout a town and people set up earlier than over here. I’m up and out at 2am with a torch assessing what there is, to try to beat the competition – and that’s late!”

Back in Britain, at fairs such as those in nearby Ardingly, and Kempton Park in Surrey, the gates usually open at a







more civilised hour (9am at Ardingly and 6.30am at Kempton) when, alongside hundreds of other vintage-hunters, Sarah will begin her search, keeping an eye out for items she knows she can sell for a profit, including white china, glass jars and French linen.

This ability to sift through piles of fabrics, furniture and kitchenalia is something Sarah has been honing since childhood when, as a girl, she would visit car-boot sales with her mother and admire family heirlooms on visits to relatives. She went to London and became a secretary but, after a few years, realised it wasn't for her and relocated to Brighton, where she met Paul, a builder and property developer. Together, they began doing up and selling houses along the West Sussex coast, with Sarah making money to pay their living costs by trading antiques on ebay or at local fairs

## SIDELINE TO FULLTIME

At the end of 2011, Sarah and Paul decided to take the plunge and focus their efforts on Goose Home & Garden ('Goose' has been her nickname since childhood). Paul created a website using the free template-provider Moonfruit, while Sarah sourced extra stock from car-boot sales and house clearances for him to photograph. "It took three months to get the business ready to launch, which we did at the Decorative Living Fair in Kent," she says. "It was nerve-racking, but we were inundated with compliments and more than covered the cost of the stand, which was a massive confidence boost."

After that, orders flooded in via the website, a result of distributing fliers at the fair and Sarah's use of social media: "I regularly upload pictures of new stock to Facebook and Pinterest, and use Twitter to promote it, too, all of

which have led to sales," she says. Each item is then carefully packaged and dispatched: "I use the Royal Mail and websites where drivers bid for business to fill up their vans, to keep costs down," Sarah explains. "We've only had a couple of breakages – we tend to deliver very fragile items ourselves, to be on the safe side."

Today, the couple are busy preparing for their next show. In his workshop, Paul is renovating a late 19th-century bank of drawers that Sarah sourced from Kempton, while she arranges a cross-section of their stock to create the perfect display on a makeshift stand in the garage. There's a definite sense of anticipation in the air as it's a Friday – the day before a weekend of rummaging at car-boot sales.

"Even though I visit markets for a living, I still get excited," Sarah says. "I'll lie awake wondering what I'm





going to find – there’s always something unexpected.” Such as the 20 French linen cloths bought for £5, then sold for £10 each, and 11,000 galvanised florists’ vases: “Paul thought I was mad investing in that quantity but I talk to traders and read interiors magazines so I’m aware of current trends,” she adds.

Sarah’s house is full of all the items she’s been unable to part with – hand-painted signs being a favourite. “When I see one in France, I have to buy it,” she says. So where are these authentic markets she raves about? And do you have to be fluent in the language to get the best price? “My French is basic,” Sarah reveals, “but I know my numbers! The well-known brocantes are in Lille and Amiens but the best ones are a closely guarded secret – like a good antique, they have to be hunted!”

**i** *Goose Home & Garden* (01273 452020; [goosehomeandgarden.com](http://goosehomeandgarden.com)).

## My path to success



### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Many of the fairs we sell at are cash or cheque only, which can be off-putting for pieces of furniture. We’re looking at card readers and apps such as Intuit, which let you take credit-card transactions using a mobile phone.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU’D KNOWN BEFORE STARTING?

I hadn’t appreciated how much work goes on behind the scenes of a website – each item needs to be photographed, described and listed, then packaged and couriered. It’s very labour-intensive. Selling at shows is far easier in comparison, because people see a product and take it straight home.

### WHAT ACHIEVEMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

We received the Best Stand Award at the

Decorative Living Fair last summer – I didn’t stop smiling for days. It gave me the confidence to exhibit at other shows, including the Wealden Times Midwinter Fair.

### ADVICE TO OTHERS?

Have the confidence to buy what you love – not what you think other people will like. You’ll naturally be drawn to certain items and then create a style that will attract like-minded customers. If something doesn’t sell straightaway, don’t panic – we had an armoire on our website for eight months until the right buyer came along.

### THE BEST THING ABOUT BEING A VINTAGE HUNTER?

The freedom. If it’s wet, I can catch up on social media at home; if it’s sunny, I seek out a new market or and go for a walk on the beach! You can’t put a value on that.



# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

## *vintage dealer*

### REFINE YOUR SEARCH

**YOUR NICHE** Decide which era or area you want to specialise in. This will enable you to become an expert in a particular field and attract loyal customers, as they will know you supply certain items.

**SOURCING STOCK** Visit antiques and charity shops, flea markets and car-boot sales. Useful websites include [ebay.co.uk](http://ebay.co.uk), with its dedicated antiques section, and [gumtree.com](http://gumtree.com) and [freecycle.org](http://freecycle.org), where unwanted pieces are given away.

**RENOVATE** You may wish to tap into current trends. Upcycling (where you refresh something old or used, and sell it as new) is popular at the moment. Consider whether you have the skills to carry out the work or need training? Do you have space at home or require a studio?

**AUTHENTICITY** Ensure you're buying genuine items by looking for signs of age. Ask the seller for more details, if in doubt, or consult an expert from the British Antique Dealers' Association ([bada.org](http://bada.org)), which can advise on value and pricing.

**STORAGE** Find a safe place to put your stock and get a quote from comparison



sites for public liability insurance and household insurance that will cover keeping antiques on the premises, such as [simplybusiness.co.uk](http://simplybusiness.co.uk).

### SELL, SELL, SELL

**PREMISES** Pay for a market stall or rent a space within a suitable shop. Approach local hotels/gastropubs that may be planning to furnish their rooms or see if you can supply cafés with furniture and accessories on the condition they are clearly marked for sale – or even hire them out.

**WEBSITE** If you prefer to sell online, create a virtual shop using a template provider with e-commerce capability such as [wix.com](http://wix.com) or [weebly.com](http://weebly.com). Use marketplaces such



as [shop.countryliving.co.uk](http://shop.countryliving.co.uk) and [ebay.co.uk](http://ebay.co.uk) to build a profile and a positive delivery record.

**DELIVERY** Compare courier prices at [parcelmonkey.co.uk](http://parcelmonkey.co.uk), [anyvan.com](http://anyvan.com) and [parcel2go.com](http://parcel2go.com).

**CUSTOMER SATISFACTION** In the event of returns or customer complaints when selling online, be sure to

comply with the Distance Selling Regulations (view them at [oft.gov.uk](http://oft.gov.uk)). If you have a physical presence, offer standard returns terms and conditions.

**PROMOTION** Use social media such as Twitter and Facebook to advertise new stock. Another way to publicise your business is by using a branded van to transport your wares.





COLLECTING

# RETRO REVIVAL

Simon Young and Vicky Pepys gave up London careers for an uncertain future in an unheated house in Northumberland. But it paid off: today their design emporium, RE, is thriving

WORDS BY RACHAEL OAKDEN ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER



back in 1993, curled up under a blanket, Vicky Pepys stared at the closing credits of *EastEnders* and wept, “I want to go home”. It was winter in Northumberland and the former fashion PR was shivering inside the wrecked quarryman’s cottage that she and husband Simon Young had swapped for their south London terrace. “The first thing we did on moving in was take out all the windows,” remembers Vicky, who is a descendant of Samuel Pepys’ family. “Looking back, I wish we’d lived in it for a bit before we started work.”

Vicky and Simon don’t do things predictably, however. Outside their 18th-century dwelling, tucked into woods down a private lane, an old bike leans against a railing slung with antique quilts. But any expectations of pared-down rusticity are dashed on entering the kitchen. Every surface, from walls to window frames, is painted in a bright tangerine orange. “We love colour,” Simon says, and, as if the room weren’t cheerful enough, he walks up to his 1963 Wurlitzer Lyric jukebox, selects an Elvis Presley song and has a boogie.

The orange walls are an apt reflection of two people more used to setting trends than following them. Simon and Vicky were ahead of their time when, in 1991, they gave up fashion careers to follow their dream of a rural life. He had been assistant designer to Betty Jackson; she was a stylist, after years working for PR legend Lynne Franks. Yet they had always yearned for a more peaceful existence. “We decided to move to the country to escape the noise and traffic,” Simon remembers. “We knew we’d be kissing our careers goodbye – fashion jobs outside London were practically non-existent – but it was all about living a calmer life. The only problem was that we didn’t know where to live it.”



### AN INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

They spent years touring Britain before finally settling in Northumberland. “We fell for it instantly,” Simon recalls. “We loved the wildness, the isolation and the fact that wind and rain kept most people away. But what really appealed to us was that everyone was so friendly. We had an old Triumph Dolomite – it was very unfashionable and our London friends laughed at it. We broke down here and the mechanic at the garage said, ‘One of our regulars has a car like that.’ That was when we knew we’d fit in.” It was 18 months before Simon secured the teaching job at what’s now Northumbria University, which enabled them to move; then another two years until they ➡







missed the buzz of her old job, but slowly carved out a new career, first as a press officer for the university and later, as email and broadband became widespread, as a fashion columnist, author and freelance PR. Today, the closest she gets to a catwalk is the fancy fowl section of the Slaley Show. “I’m poultry secretary as well as PR co-ordinator,” she says. “I just can’t give up PR – if I find something I love, I need to tell people about it.” In 2003, Vicky had a new story to shout about, when Simon went into business with Jenny Vaughan, a fashion designer who once worked for Ossie Clark.

Jenny taught with Simon at Newcastle Polytechnic before they both found jobs at a Sunderland-based clothing company. “We used to travel a lot together, and to pass the time we fantasised about running a shop,” Simon says. “We both love flea markets and bric-a-brac – my mum and dad were antique jewellery dealers – and we had this idea of mixing old and new in a big industrial space. We had no retail experience, but as designers we knew how to put a collection together. Gradually the fantasy took shape.”



“WE HAD NO RETAIL EXPERIENCE, BUT AS DESIGNERS WE KNEW HOW TO CREATE A COLLECTION”

bought Quarry House, a wreck outside Slaley, near the market town of Corbridge. Vicky now smiles at the midwinter meltdown that was the low point of their ten-year renovation. “When we moved in, the electricity supply was really bad; we spent four Christmases without power.” Isolated in the chilly cottage, Vicky initially

### OPENING THE DOOR

The result was RE, a hangar-sized emporium hidden behind a petrol station in Corbridge. First-time visitors stop in their tracks on crossing the modest threshold of this former mechanics’ workshop: inside is a vast and beautifully staged theatre of stuff. Antique chandeliers hang from steel rafters. Charming old dressers are crammed with displays of Victorian glassware and contemporary white china. A basket of secondhand corkscrews sits by the entrance; kitsch wax-candle asparagus, pineapples and melons catch the eye.

“If people don’t buy anything, we don’t mind, as long as they leave with a smile on their face – that’s what shopping should be about,” Simon ➞







says. He points out some of his and Jenny's designs: a vintage-inspired boiled wool cushion with a Scottie-dog motif; a colourful woolly parrot that's actually a teapot-handle cover. "It's knitted by one of our local ladies," he grins. "Isn't it fabulous?"

His customers certainly think so. Sales have grown by 30 per cent each year and the mail-order trade is "a phenomenon". Vicky says. "Simon and Jenny go against the grain of what retailers are supposed to do, because they buy what they like rather than what their customers might want. But, with two such original, creative people in charge, it can't fail."

Back home, Vicky shares Simon's tongue-in-cheek style. Their home is full of flea-market finds and colour. Simon is an avid collector of celery jars and commemorative 'disaster' glasses, which crowd the tables and cupboards. "The objects that appeal to us are ones

that tell stories," he says. "They're things that someone has used or loved." There's a feelgood glow about their house and business. It's not just the 12-acre plot with its own woodland, stream, cottage garden and chickens, or their flourishing careers. Perhaps it comes from the couple's palpable sense of contentment. They are unanimous about what they most love about life in Slaley: friends and community.

"When we sold up in London, we thought we'd have no friends, yet the opposite was true," Vicky says. "We were so keen to get to know people, we'd have gone to the opening of a bag of crisps, but it was easy." Simon agrees: "In London, you meet people, say 'We must get together' and never see them again. Here, they make a date there and then." ■

**i** RE (01434 634567; [re-foundobjects.com](http://re-foundobjects.com)).



## Putting down roots

You can guarantee that a significant proportion of the people you have been squashed up against during your daily commute are also fantasising about upping sticks from the town or city and starting a new business in the countryside – but only a few will do it and fewer still will make as much of a success of it as RE have done. Turning dreams into reality is hard work. Before you decide to change your life, consider how you will feel isolated from your existing support network of friends and family in an unfamiliar place.

You must be willing to immerse yourself in the community you have moved to. Perfect your pitch so that local people understand your business and how it may benefit them and the village or market town you are now living in. Support local events and other businesses in the area and encourage former colleagues to get involved (both city and rural collaborations make great PR). Your new neighbours are likely to be your initial customers, your future employees and sources of materials, so nurture your relationships with them – the more you are involved with what's going on, the more your new acquaintances are likely to invest in and support your success.







COLLECTING

# SHOP OF DELIGHTS

Tapping into the growing trend of sewing and crafting, one woman has drawn on her own love of making and collecting to create a colourful emporium full of notions, trimmings and vintage delights

WORDS BY AMANDA HOWARD ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER



mother-of-pearl buttons glint by the jarful next to still-sparkling 1920s gold ric-rac, embroidered tablecloths, and vintage floral china at The Old Haberdashery in the village of Ticehurst in East Sussex. “I have combined my two loves – sewing and vintage – so there is something to inspire everyone who comes into the shop,” says owner Sonia Boriczewski. “I want customers to leave with a bag of beautiful finds and a head full of ideas of things to make.”

Sonia has been crafting from an early age, inspired by her Slovenian maternal grandmother, who was the village seamstress – “It’s definitely in the blood”. After studying textile design at Chelsea College of Art and Design, she then set up a workshop making delicate paper yarn accessories. But it was the nine years of travelling the world with her husband Jonny for his job at a paint company that provided the starting point for her shop. “I spent a lot of time going round antiques fairs and visited an industrial market in China where I bought bags ➔









of buttons, silk and even safety pins. I had no idea what I was going to do with them," she says.

## MAKING A NEW LIFE

Laden with these and similar finds, Sonia, Jonny and their two children, Eva and Joey, returned to the UK in 2008 and settled in the small Sussex village of Stonegate. As the house became increasingly cluttered with even more of Sonia's market purchases, she decided to start selling her collection at school fairs and, following positive feedback from customers, also rented a small space in a vintage shop nearby. When local entrepreneur Richard Upton saw her stand at The Bell at Ticehurst's Frost Fair in December 2011, he encouraged her to open her own store. Just three months later, it was a reality. "TV's

"I COULDN'T LIVE ON BUTTONS ALONE, SO I DECIDED TO SELL COMPLIMENTARY PIECES FROM COMPANIES THAT HAVE AN ETHOS I LIKE"

*The Great British Sewing Bee* had re-ignited people's interest in making, but I felt it was still a matter of taking a leap into the unknown," Sonia says. In addition to scouring car-boot sales, house clearances and antiques markets to build up her existing stock, Sonia sourced notions and patterns from Merchant & Mills, hand-carved woodblocks from Bazaar and stitching kits from Nancy Nicholson. "I knew that I couldn't live on buttons alone, so I decided to sell complementary pieces from companies that have an ethos

I like," she says. With a budget of just £3,000 (from her savings and a small family loan), she salvaged all the shop fittings to keep costs down. Today, the space is a stylish mix of colours and interesting textures, with haberdashery pieces, old and new, displayed beside secondhand finds: a wooden workbench, bought from a nearby tip for £5, holds a vintage French bottle drier laden with pretty grosgrain and silk ribbon wound on old spools. Elsewhere, a marble-topped Singer sewing machine table is covered with







reels of pink and pistachio green metallic thread, while piles of Hungarian grain sacks, sari silk, crochet blankets and eiderdowns are stacked on a Victorian ironing table. “I look around and can see my influences – the colours from Asia and the peasant pieces that remind me of childhood summers in Slovenia,” she says.

Although much of Sonia’s time now is spent turning her business into a brand – “I want to set up an online store and eventually start running sewing workshops” – she still finds opportunities to be creative, whether it’s looking for new artisan makers, browsing social media for inspiration

or designing scarves, which she hopes to make and sell. Serving customers, about half of whom are crafters (the other half are interested in her vintage pieces), is a particular highlight. “Seeing people as excited as I am about making is so rewarding and I never tire of it. At no point have I seen the two elements of my business as being separate. A cup and saucer could be used as a candle holder, or turned into a pin cushion or pretty plant pot – my passion is to present things in a new way,” she says. ■

**i** *The Old Haberdashery (07891 954971; [theoldhaberdashery.com](http://theoldhaberdashery.com)).*



## My path to success

### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Finding a work-life balance. Fortunately, I have supportive friends and an understanding husband who puts up with lace and linen around the house. Even on holiday, it’s hard to switch off: I went to Italy and came back with a suitcase of things to sell.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN BEFORE STARTING?

How to manage my stock. Never underestimate how much you’ll need. I opened on a Thursday and sold so much that I had to go and buy more the next day. I’ve also learnt not to become reliant on certain vintage products. There are some items I used to sell a lot of that I struggle to find nowadays.

### WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT RUNNING A HABERDASHERY?

I love seeing what people have made using my materials. Knowing I’ve helped them create a unique item is fantastic.

### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHERS WANTING TO OPEN THEIR OWN HABERDASHERY?

Trust your judgement; don’t buy with other people in mind as you won’t have a cohesive look, and give yourself a point of difference – I stock unusual yarns such as organic nettle and hemp. Every piece has a story and you are there to tell it – this makes it more interesting for everyone.



# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

## *haberdashery*

### GET STARTED

**DECIDE ON A NAME** Choose one that reflects your brand and products you offer. You can theme this to current trends – vintage, country-style, Scandinavian – but make sure it's understandable to your audience.

### **OFFER A VARIETY OF STOCK**

Don't restrict yourself to just one craft; think about selling complementary items – quilting, knitting and sewing accessories work well together. Think of it like a sweet shop: customers come in to buy chocolate but may leave with humbugs and sherbet lemons, too.

**SET UP ONLINE** Building an e-commerce site is a cheaper and lower-risk option to renting a shop. Try the free templates at *tictail.com*, which come with a range of payment options. To design your own newsletters, go to *mailchimp.com*.

### **CREATE A SENSORY EXPERIENCE**

Due to the tactile nature of a haberdashery, customers will want to see and feel your items. Take stalls at local markets and fairs – try *stallfinder.com*. They may be hard work, but the customer interaction is invaluable.

**REFINE YOUR SMALL PRINT** As many sales will be bespoke,

such as one-off lengths of ribbon, be clear about your terms and conditions – will you accept returns? If you do, consider how you will resell items without losing out on profit.

### TAKING THE LEAD

**GO THE EXTRA MILE** As well as stocking basics, set yourself apart by selling items that aren't readily available on the high street. Look for unusual textiles and ribbons when travelling or via social media sites such as Pinterest, which is also a great way of discovering current trends.

### **GENERATE REPEAT CUSTOM**

Take time to get to know your customers and make them feel special – enclose gifts with repeat orders, offer free delivery, host networking events and provide a service for crafting queries on your Twitter and Facebook sites.

### **DEVELOP YOUR BUSINESS ONLINE**

Attend technical seminars held by local business groups in areas such as Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) and issue a regular newsletter to ensure you remain in your customers' minds. Host online video tutorials, which will attract people from all over the



world and provide PR opportunities.

### **EXPAND YOUR BRAND**

E-books, crafting kits, fabric collections, workshops – respond to your clients' needs, while making your company accessible to a wider audience at the same time.

### HONE YOUR TALENT

Whether you want to start a business or feed your passion, there is a course for you...

### **ARDINGTON SCHOOL OF CRAFTS, ARDINGTON, OXFORDSHIRE**

Improve your sewing machine skills, learn to fit a commercial pattern and make textile home accessories with the expert guidance of *The Great British Sewing*

Bee's May Martin (01235 833433; *ardingtonschoolofcrafts.com*).

### **COOL CRAFTING, HINCASTER, CUMBRIA**

Former Next pattern cutter Sarah Peel will show you how to make fabric bags, loungewear and dresses using vintage materials in her beautiful Victorian home (01539 561928; *coolcrafting.co.uk*).

### **HOOP, TENTERDEN, KENT**

Transfer designs to textiles and learn how to embroider using a variety of stitches with crafter and lifestyle photographer Vanessa Davies (01580 388011; *hoophaberdashery.co.uk*).

### **THE MAKERY, BATH**

This crafting hub offers sewing-based workshops, as well as an online haberdashery shop (01225 581888; *themaker.co.uk*).



Much Ado Books

01323 871222

Old &

BOOKS





COLLECTING

# LIVING BY THE BOOK

Much Ado Books is every bibliophile's dream. Housed inside a period building in Alfriston, East Sussex, it is a bewitching emporium of bestsellers and antiquarian collectables

WORDS BY CATHERINE BUTLER ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW MONTGOMERY

Love is in the air at Much Ado Books in Alfriston, East Sussex. Each time a customer steps inside, heart-shaped paper chains and other Valentine decorations made from the pages of old books flutter in a gust of wind. "You never know who is going to drift in through the door," says Cate Olson, who runs this bustling little bookshop with her husband Nash Robbins, whom she met when he did just that, 29 years ago. She had recently opened her first secondhand bookshop, also called Much Ado, in Marblehead, Massachusetts, where Nash worked for a local paper. "I was such a bad reporter that I didn't notice the store at first," he says. "It was a remarkable place, with Cate at the centre surrounded by friends. There were always events or parties going on, completely opposite to the staid, dusty bookshops I'd known previously." Nash soon left his newspaper job and was happily installed behind Much Ado's counter. But how did this busy little New England bookshop find its way across the Atlantic to a small Sussex cottage with sloping floors? "We wanted to

showcase some wonderful books not available in chainshops and travelled to England each autumn to source them," Nash says. "We'd often stay in Alfriston and thought about coming over here full-time. When this space became available, we realised that we could."

## SETTING UP SHOP

Much Ado's new home, No 1 Steamer Cottages, dates back to the 14th century and in previous incarnations has been a traditional inn and a greengrocer's, run by a retired opera singer. There was a lot of work to do, but with the busy festive season approaching, Cate and Nash decided to open before renovations were complete. "We vividly remember author Lynne Truss coming in to speak about *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* the very week it reached number one in the bestseller list, with her audience squeezed into a building site covered in sawdust," Cate says.

Eleven years on, Much Ado sells old and new books; the vellum covers of antiquarian stock beside this year's bestsellers on a hotchpotch of shelves salvaged from auctions, antiques fairs ➔





## Creating a difference

Being engulfed by the big players can be the scourge of small businesses; reputation, speed of delivery, market share and, most of all, cost can mean that you won't necessarily be the first port of call. Thankfully, many people are looking for a different experience, not just a book in a bag, and these are the customers you should be targeting. Like Cate and Nash, research what is currently available on the high street and do what those offerings can't. Make your surroundings as un-corporate as possible – offer activities, comfort, old and new. Additional treats and perks (such as

offering homemade biscuits) will keep people coming back. The longer they stay, the more they are likely to spend. Above all, your passion and an encyclopedic knowledge of the products will differentiate you from other shops of your type.



and boot sales. Even adults can't resist the charm of the children's corner tucked away beneath the stairs. Home-baked shortbread awaits customers at the counter and, if the weather is fine, you can step outside to peruse the bookshelves in the garden and meet Much Ado's three bantams.

### THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Despite its intimate size, this is a shop in which to lose oneself, with nooks and crannies where you can perch on a step or a cushion and pore over a once-loved copy of *The Tales of King Arthur*, delve into the new Hilary Mantel or leaf through Cate's scrapbooks of pressed flowers, handwritten notes, old postcards and other mementos found between the pages of old books. "We'd had about 20 years of visiting bookshops and noting the things we did and did not like. This was our chance to open our perfect shop. We want our visitors to feel comfortable, and take their time choosing a book," says Cate, whose greatest delight is







"WE'RE A CONDUIT FOR BOOKS THAT NEED A NEW HOME – A RESTING PLACE TO HELP THEM FIND SOMEONE TO CARE FOR THEM AND ENJOY THEM"

finding a customer something they would never have dreamed of reading. "Yesterday a man returned to the shop to thank me for a book I suggested to him last week. I was so pleased that he wanted to come back and share his enjoyment with me."

"We're a conduit for books that need a new home," Nash continues. "A resting place to help them find someone to care for them, enjoy them and continue their life." Every book on Much Ado's shelves is chosen either by Cate, who has a particular fondness for novels, or Nash, whose penchant is for history. "A few years ago, an elderly customer brought in almost 40 volumes of valuable hand-coloured botanical drawings and explained that

she was very unwell and wanted to ensure they went to a good home," Cate says. "We had never handled anything quite like them and they are much sought after. But we wanted to make sure no one would take them to pieces. We waited until we found a buyer we could be sure would treat them as the previous owner had wished. This is one of the most poignant aspects of our work."

Cate and Nash have a real sense of duty to each volume in their shop, and, no matter how tattered, a book is never a lost cause. "We get some that aren't sellable but that would be a tragedy to throw away. We extend their lives by reusing the parts still in good condition," Nash says. All around the shop are books recycled in beautiful and imaginative

ways: re-covered notebooks, spiral bound and sandwiched between old covers of *Andy Pandy* annuals or gold-embossed history books; Art Deco bookplates stuck onto paper bags; comic strips turned into badges and fridge magnets; even the 'Just feeding the hens' sign on the front door is painted onto an old leather book cover.

## COMMUNITY HUB

From July onwards, all their spare time is taken up with sewing hundreds of stockings made from old blankets, which they embroider and decorate with felt pictures inspired by book jackets. "We sell them to raise money for our chosen Christmas cause, most recently to an orphanage and school in Uganda," Nash explains.

"Taking part in our community is ingrained in us," he continues. "We've worked on the historical society and helped with the village fête." In return, Much Ado receives strong local support as well as having become something of a destination shop, despite its rural location. "We realised we wouldn't get the same numbers of customers as before, although the internet has helped," Nash says. "Being in this particular village is great – there are only 700 residents, but there is also a stream of holidaymakers and daytrippers, so we get good combinations of weekly, monthly and even annual visitors."

In 2007, Much Ado was named The Aurum Press Independent Bookshop of the Year, an accolade they have earned through their wealth of extra activities such as book groups, craft workshops and readings, even offering customers the chance to print their own bookmarks on a press. But Cate and Nash are definitely not the sort to rest on their laurels... ■

*Since this article was first published, Much Ado Books has moved to 8 West Street, Alfriston, East Sussex ([muchadobooks.com](http://muchadobooks.com)).*



## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE #6:

# *Establishing your brand*

**WE UNDERSTAND A LOT ABOUT BRANDS THESE DAYS** Often before we know anything about what a product looks, feels, tastes or smells like, we recognise the logo or style. This identity is an assurance of quality, price or promise. Creating a brand for a small business is just as important as for a multinational; designing an identity that appeals to your target customer, your retailers or wholesalers gives you the story that leads customers towards a sale. But don't get so caught up in developing yours that you forget the end game: profit. Building a brand is about giving customers a compelling reason to buy (hopefully multiple times).

**YOUR VALUES** You need to think carefully about what you want your customers to believe about your product and take every opportunity to strengthen those beliefs. Are you the cheapest, the best quality, the most fashionable, ethical, honest,

local, most fun – all are brand values that your customer will identify with. These qualities must come through in your customer interactions, your conversations, your marketing and your social media – ask yourself what you mean to your customer. As the founder of a small business, you are the brand, and its principles are likely to be your own, so you will sound authentic and honest. Being consistent, giving a repeated delivery and genuine messaging will help to reinforce those values, so be sure to do this.

**A WORD OF WARNING** It's a big market and there can only be one 'cheapest' or one 'most fashionable' for each customer. Define what is important to those people who are likely to buy, and pinpoint one or two beliefs about your offering that make you different and encourage customers to purchase from you.



**DEFINING A STRAPLINE:** this is really just your marketing proposition squeezed into a few words; a simple statement that describes what your customers believe about your business. We all know them: 'When your heart is in the country', 'Just do it' and 'Never knowingly undersold'. Scribble some words on sticky notes and rearrange until something resonates.



# PRODUCT, PRICE, PROMOTION AND PLACE

These cornerstones of marketing have a part to play even in a small new business. The four Ps mnemonic remind you of all the different parts of your business that your customers see and so enable you to check that your brand values are clear and consistent at each stage.

**EVERYTHING YOUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES ABOUT THE PRODUCT IS KEY** Its shape, its smell, its colour, its taste, its ingredients, what clothes a person who delivers a service is wearing...

**THE COST OF THE PRODUCT SHOULD BE TRANSPARENT AND CONSISTENT** You don't have to be the cheapest unless that's your niche, but remember that customers equate low price with low quality, so selling your items too inexpensively could be damaging.

**USUALLY MARKETING AND ADVERTISING ARE THE BEST WAYS TO OFFER PROMOTIONS** These are both the easiest place to convey your message and the easiest place for everything to go horribly wrong. For example, if your business stands for quality but your product falls to pieces, people will question your values (via social media, this can happen very quickly).

**WHERE YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE IS SOLD PLAYS A BIG PART** – it often presents the only opportunity that customers have to interact with you, whether face-to-face or online. This concentrates your brand values into one experience, so make sure these don't conflict with potential buyers' experiences, and remember that a cumbersome online transaction can also cause conflict.

**YOUR GREATEST ASSET IS A GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO SELL YOUR PRODUCT ON YOUR BEHALF** – your customers. Most people want to share details of their world and their successes with family and colleagues. The more your customer aligns themselves with your brand values, and feels positive about your product, the more they will reveal about themselves (online and face to face). Provided your values are aligned, the product is perfect and the sale smooth, your customers are likely to boast about how clever they were in buying



from you. But you can help and encourage them to say more about what you sell by giving them a reason to recommend – be creative and use social media. Pinterest and Instagram work well for visual products, a card in with your product saying, 'Five reasons your friends might like ...', invite your customers for a free tea (with a list of the markets you are at), e-newsletters and blogs that customers want to read (which shouldn't be just a sales pitch).

**PITCHING IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY** to take the floor, to talk to your customer, your suppliers, your sales outlets, your funders and the media. You must seize this (and every) opportunity to demonstrate that the brand values that appear all over your marketing and promotion are real. It's your pitch – practise it over and over, ensure your values are clear and you can make an impact in 25-60 seconds.



# Make lotions & potions

Launch a beauty business  
by harnessing the power  
of plants and essential oils









BEAUTY

# PURPLE HEAVEN IN THE HILLS

A few years ago, Nancy Durham had grown little more than a geranium in a pot. Now she earns an income from the fragrant lavender fields she boldly planted on a windswept Welsh farm

WORDS BY LOUISE ELLIOTT • PHOTOGRAPHS BY RACHEL WARNE











Take the single-track road that runs from Builth Wells in Powys towards the parish of Maesmynis and you are instantly immersed in a rural landscape unchanged for centuries. A tapestry of lush green fields, hawthorn hedgerows, bridlepaths and ancient woodland covers the gentle contours of the Mynydd Epynt hills, where flocks of sheep graze the rich pastures, and red kites circle overhead. Continue to the top of the ridge, 1,000 feet above sea level, however, and you may feel as though you are in a patch of Provence. Stretching out around a stone longhouse and its cluster of barns are three acres of lavender fields – neatly planted in ordered rows, the purple flowers sway in the breeze and scent the air with their perfume. This is the view that provides Nancy Durham with the perfect start to summertime days spent harvesting her hard-earned crop: “Every morning I pull up the blinds and can’t wait to get out there.” Such positive energy is essential, as the hours are long and the work demanding. Nancy and her small team of helpers cut the decorative varieties by hand, using serrated-edged sickles. Bent low, they carefully work their way along the lines, gathering huge armfuls of fragrant blooms. The flowers are then loaded onto wheelbarrows and a wooden cart, and transported uphill to the drying barns. “Harvest time is glorious but laborious, in the best sense of the word,” Nancy says. “I always sleep well, though, because I’m constantly surrounded by the soothing aroma.”

### AGAINST THE ODDS

Today, more than 9,000 plants flourish on the slopes. Nancy and her husband, Bill Newton-Smith, both Canadians, were the first people to cultivate lavender on a field scale in Wales – not a country usually associated with this sun-loving Mediterranean species. Nancy had never grown anything more than a geranium in a pot before the



NANCY PLANNED TO PLANT JUST A FEW LAVENDER BUSHES IN THE GARDEN – THERE ARE NOW MORE THAN 9,000

idea began to take root – but then both she and Bill do rather like a challenge. When he bought the weathered, early 18th-century longhouse in 1974 as a weekend retreat while a philosophy don at Oxford, it was run-down and uninhabited, and the surrounding fields were owned and worked by a local sheep farmer. Bill and Nancy, a journalist, met in the 1980s and became increasingly attached to the area and its natural beauty. To feel even more part of the landscape, in 2002 they acquired 45 acres in the

valley and six around the house. “Bill had retired from Oxford and we wanted to live here full time and be part of the community,” Nancy explains. “But once we had the land, we didn’t quite know what we were going to do with it.”

Inspired by the 20-foot-long lavender hedge she’d always admired outside their former Oxford home, Nancy initially planned to plant just a few bushes in their garden. But during a chance conversation with a neighbour, she heard about Glasu, a rural development partnership ➔





## Tap into local knowledge

For a small business, adding to the product range is often prohibitive, so think about complementary items made in your area that could enrich the customer experience and encourage them to buy more. Trading materials, such as honey for lavender, will not only save you money but strengthen the proposition and creating a great PR story. If you're struggling to find businesses, try networking. Women in Rural Enterprise has business-support networks in the UK – see [wireuk.org/networks](http://wireuk.org/networks).

offering funding to help farms diversify. “He wondered if a lavender field would qualify, but I doubted it could be grown so high up and in such wet conditions,” Nancy recalls. “I thought nothing but sheep could thrive here.”

### THE GROUNDWORK

Intrigued by the idea, however, Nancy researched hardy varieties that might withstand the windswept conditions and gradually realised the steeply sloping hillsides could offer the drainage the plant requires. In September 2003, she made the bold decision to introduce 2,000 tiny plugs at one go, helped by funding from Glasu, which has continued over the years. “Family and friends worked alongside us but it was difficult as the soil was hard as rock – now we know that we should have ploughed the field first,” Nancy says. “We did add a little lime, though, to create the slightly alkaline conditions that lavender

prefers.” Throughout the following seasons, she studied each plant carefully and recorded its progress, walking round the field with a clipboard and grading them to see which varieties did best. “I was surprised and thrilled that my initial doubts weren’t confirmed,” Nancy adds.

She knew that to turn the project into a viable commercial venture, they would require more plants (they added another 7,000 in 2010) and would also need to learn how to distil oil from the crop: “I felt that lavender was making a bit of a comeback and losing its old-fashioned image. Its healing and calming powers are now well-documented and I wanted to expand into a range of skincare that harnessed these benefits.”

### NATURAL ESSENCE

Nancy and Bill first experimented with a prototype still made from two coffee urns and produced a few tiny vials of



their own oil. “I tested it on friends and they loved the wild scent,” Nancy remembers. To create greater amounts, though, the couple commissioned a bespoke still from John Dore & Co in Guildford, Surrey, the oldest distillery engineering business in the world. The beautiful stainless-steel equipment is now housed inside a wooden barn, once a stable, where Bill keeps a close eye on operations. Fortuitously, at around the same time, Nancy was introduced to Helen Lowe of Laughing Bird Body Care, based in Gwynedd, who was keen to try the first Welsh lavender oil. Their collaboration resulted in a soothing skincare range, which Nancy launched in 2011.

### CUTTING THE CROP

Three lavender varieties now thrive on the farm, creating a palette of purple throughout summer. ‘Royal Purple’ and ‘Imperial Gem’ are grown to be dried, while ‘Grosso’ produces the oil. Harvest time begins in the second week of July with the decorative types. Nancy, Bill and the team bunch the blooms together inside the stone barn or at trestle tables set up outside. “We need to work quite quickly, though, then suspend each one on wires across the barn to dry before the next lot is gathered,” Nancy says.

The oil cultivars are cut at the end of July and throughout August. Unlike the tidy bundles of long stems gathered for the decorative varieties, these are cut shorter with the help of a mechanised tea plucker imported from Japan. “At the height of the season, we do three cycles a day, but it’s always exciting to watch the process and bottle the golden residue,” Nancy says. With an array of old cane chairs, dressers filled with rustic equipment and, of course, a heavenly scent, the barn where distillation takes place offers the ideal spot for an informal shop. After the harvest, Nancy puts all her energy into marketing the creams and balms

now selling worldwide – as well as formulating other plans for her crop. She has also developed an artisan Welsh Lavender chocolate bar with Carmarthenshire-based chocolatier Liam Burgess of NomNom Chocolate.

Cutting back and shaping every row after summer is another priority, and Nancy propagates her own stock to replace old plants. But there’s no doubt that harvest time is her favourite part of living on a lavender farm: “Out in the fields, with bees buzzing around and butterflies, including the endangered ‘Monarch’, flitting among the flowers, is like being in a patch of purple heaven.”

 *Welsh Lavender* (01982 552467; [welshlavender.com](http://welshlavender.com)).







BEAUTY

# A WILTSHIRE SOAP STORY

Discover how a small team of women capture the scents of the countryside in their organic soaps, made by hand in the kitchen behind a fascinating shop in the village of Lacock

WORDS BY CAROLINE ATKINS ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW MONTGOMERY





Jacqui Sheard can remember when her shop was the village stores, back in the early 1980s, with that distinctive bouquet of disparate smells: cheese, washing powder, and ham sold by the slice. Now the 13th-century building is perfumed with the aromas of lavender, lemon, camomile and rose, its shelves stacked with Jacqui's handmade organic soaps, flower-scented bath crystals and blue glass jars of natural creams. The kitchen worktops are spread with baking trays in which soaps set, like cakes waiting to be turned out, and the shop window, overlooking West Street in

Lacock, Wiltshire, wouldn't look out of place in *Cranford*, or one of the other period dramas for which this screen-friendly, perfectly preserved National Trust village has provided the backdrop.

Quintessentially English began life in 2000, after Jacqui had been selling her soaps for a year from a unit behind The George Inn across the road. She has known Lacock since her teens, when her mother moved here as a widow and Jacqui came for weekends, first from art school in Kingston and then from London, where she and her husband David met as graphic designers. The couple had already bought their





own cottage – in the next village – and established their design studio, by the time Jacqui began experimenting with soap and looking for a place to sell it. “It was the late 90s, when work was slow, so when I read a *Country Living* feature about remilling supermarket soap with essential oils to make your own, I had time to try it out – wrecking some pans in the process,” she recalls.

### TRIAL AND ERROR

The kitchen may have suffered but the soaps were a success. “David was my chief tester,” Jacqui says. “He dutifully tried out all manner of formulas.” She relished the hands-on mixing and making and decided to take the idea

further. After devising her master recipe, she produced a small batch of homemade soap. Producing that first kilo gave her the satisfaction she’d felt at art school, and with her packaging and brochure design skills in place, Jacqui realised she had a whole new business at her fingertips.

The couple’s design studio was still based in Bath at this point, so she started small, renting the work unit from the National Trust on a weekend basis. It was a step into the unknown and certain aspects of running the shop were daunting. “I deal calmly with thousands of pounds from our design clients, yet here I was, flustered about giving change from a fiver,” Jacqui

says. However, by the end of the year, she was selling soap seven days a week and had even taken on an assistant. And then the West Street shop became free.

### THE PERFECT PREMISES

“We were up against dozens of applicants but the Trust keeps a balance between different kinds of business in the village, and we won the lease,” Jacqui says. The estate manager advised us to have a second income, so we continued our design work.” She took out a small loan to cover the print costs of her packaging, and splits her time between the studio upstairs and the shop underneath. She now employs Leah and Mel, who work in the shop during the week and help with soap-making, plus two assistants on a Saturday, enabling her to keep up with the increasing demand for her products: “Lacock has so many visitors, which is great for business, plus we sell by mail order through the website.”

They start early on their weekly making days, using a countertop hob and traditional pan in the back kitchen to melt down the palm oil (from a Soil Association-approved supplier) and coconut oil, then mixing it in a bucket with 25kg olive oil: “We manage just 25 litres in a day because we take it in turns to stir it all by hand.” The sodium hydroxide (also known as ‘lye’) has to be added in the courtyard garden and involves wearing goggles and gloves. “Even the smallest speck will burn your skin,” Jacqui says. It’s the reaction between the alkaline lye and the acidic oils that makes them bind, rendering the pH level neutral so it is safe for skin.

The production process can make the kitchen sound more chemistry lab than cottage industry, but there’s nothing futuristic about the recipes followed at Quintessentially English: soap has been made this way since at least Roman times. There’s a particular satisfaction in knowing that the method can’t be hurried – at the end of the afternoon, Jacqui, Carlene and







## SOAPS HAVE BEEN MADE THIS WAY SINCE ROMAN TIMES – AND THE PROCESS SIMPLY CAN'T BE HURRIED

Abigail place scoops of the mixture in earthenware bowls and add the appropriate herbs, ground rose petals and essential oils to create blends.

There are 17 soaps in the range – many inspired by the fragrances and properties of flowers, such as Buttercup and Neroli (“gently uplifting”), Lavender Fields (“popular for its soothing properties”) and Chamomile Lawn (“good for stressed skins”), and other aspects of the natural world.

### AN ARTISAN APPROACH

After adding the fragrances, the team then pour the mix into flexible wooden or plastic moulds and cake trays to set. The tiny rosebuds and sprigs of lavender are pressed in by hand, and all Jacqui's ingredients are as natural as possible. The garden is sheltered enough for her to grow lavender (although she buys extra

from Kent), lemon balm and rosemary, and has an olive tree, the leaves of which Jacqui presses into her Moonbeam soap. The principal ingredient of her beeswax creams and lip balms comes from local hives; her bath oils are blended on site.

Jacqui now sells to customers across the UK, but getting through winter can still be a challenge. She and David at least can schedule their work to focus on the design side when the film companies come to the village. “I’m not complaining – we do benefit from the tourists,” Jacqui says, “but it does rather disrupt business. After all, if someone spots Greg Wise in the street, they’re not going to be thinking about buying Dandelion and Burdock soap, are they?” ■

**Quintessentially English**  
(01249 730100;  
[quintessentiallyenglish.co.uk](http://quintessentiallyenglish.co.uk)).

## Rules and regulations

Once you go from making lotions and potions for yourself, friends and family to selling them, all beauty products must comply with the law, even if you are making on a small scale. They are bound by the Cosmetic Products Regulations (see [legislation.gov.uk](http://legislation.gov.uk)) and each product must be uploaded to the Central Notification Portal (visit [cosmeticsafetyassessment.com](http://cosmeticsafetyassessment.com)). However, don't let this put you off – most of these processes need to be done only once. For further information, see the Guild of Craft Soap & Toiletry Makers' website ([gcstm.co.uk](http://gcstm.co.uk)).





BEAUTY

# THE HARVEST THAT HEALS

Harnessing the soothing and restorative powers of the plants they grow, a botanist and his wife produce innovative beauty creams in the Herefordshire countryside

WORDS BY KITTY CORRIGAN • PHOTOGRAPHS BY CRISTIAN BARNETT



After a hard day's harvesting, there is nothing Carol Richards likes better than to pamper herself with meadowsweet muscle balm followed by her favourite scented moisturiser, infused with marshmallow, calendula and evening-primrose oil. Their effectiveness is particularly satisfying because not only have these natural, organic ingredients been grown on the smallholding that Carol runs with her husband Paul, but the couple also produce the creams themselves. Today, at the height of the picking season, the fields outside the village of Eardisley in Herefordshire, where they run their company Herbfarmacy, are ablaze with colour. Next to echinacea's bronze flower-head cones fringed with exotic pink petals are rows of orange calendula, sky-blue cornflowers, tall yellow spires of mullein, swathes of lilac marshmallow and golden Californian poppies. Bees and butterflies drink in the nectar, then, as each crop fades, birds swoop down to feast on the seed heads.

Usually in charge of admin, Carol has instead donned her sunhat and, together with Paul and a six-to-ten-strong team of staff and volunteers, can be seen digging up echinacea plants one by one, stripping off the dead leaves and rinsing the roots at a trestle

table in the open air. "We used to have a row of washing-up bowls and rubber gloves," she says. "Now we've progressed to a pressure washer. Everything is done manually, from picking the heads off calendula and camomile plants to hoeing between the rows of our other herbs and wild flowers."

### KEY INGREDIENT

Processing the harvest is quite a task for the Herbfarmacy team, who, in an average year, will collect a tonne of echinacea plants – described by Paul as "brilliant to grow because the flower, stem and root can all be used". Having researched, cultivated and sold herbal products for 30 years, Paul, who has a degree in botany and a doctorate in plant physiology, saw the herb's potential as an immune-system booster long before it became fashionable as a wonder drug, and planted his first crop in 1983. "I suddenly had a brainwave, and realised that the future is echinacea," he says. It was only a matter of time before other herbs and wild flowers were introduced – chosen, originally, for their medicinal qualities or ability to combat issues such as skin conditions, digestive problems and sleeping disorders. "When I set up Herbfarmacy, I was specialising in ➡





## CAROL AND PAUL BLEND THE OILS DISTILLED FROM THE HARVESTED FLOWERS WITH FAIRTRADE INGREDIENTS

tinctures and herbal remedies,” Paul says, spreading vibrant orange calendula petals on a wooden tray, ready to be placed in a drier before being added to oil and left to infuse. “I never thought I’d end up making beauty products.” He was also rearing goats and pigs but when he met Carol, a co-ordinator for the mental-health charity Mind, 17 years ago, she persuaded him to focus on the herbs, and that the animals needed to go. Gradually, they have expanded from a three-quarters-of-an-acre plot to five acres, buying surrounding land as it has become available, and implementing the farming practices that Paul learned when running an organic smallholding in Aberdeenshire.

### A UNIQUE FEAT

Herbfarmacy is now the only company in Britain to grow organically, process and make its lotions and potions in one place – ‘from seed to skin’. But it hasn’t all been plain sailing. The company’s change of direction was the result of an amendment to EU legislation in 2004, which meant that products such as those Paul was making could only be sold as ‘traditional herbal remedies’, and had to be registered – at considerable expense. Paul and Carol had no choice but to diversify into skincare, though it meant entering a more competitive market.

Starting at their kitchen table, and supported by match funding from Business Link Herefordshire, the couple experimented by blending combinations of their herbal oils with Fairtrade ingredients such as shea



## Natural as a brand

Including only natural – and, where possible, local – ingredients in your skincare range is a compelling sales proposition, but convey this in a simple message. Customers also need to be confident

in your credentials, so highlight your qualifications and understanding of botanical techniques. The packaging should reflect this and help strengthen the brand. Before you sell products, you must meet

cosmetic legislation and labelling laws and have them tested and approved by a certified assessor. Contact your local council’s trading standards office or search ‘Trading Standards Cosmetic Guidance’ online.



butter and beeswax, and avocado, apricot kernel and macadamia oils that couldn't be grown on the farm. The protective balms and moisturising lotions were then tested on friends, family and staff. "We came up with some weird-looking mixtures," Carol recalls. "But, after 12 months of hard work, we had ten health and beauty products ready to sell."

### TRUE TO THEIR ROOTS

Nine years on and Herbfarmacy's very first release, Replenish Face Cream, remains the highest seller – it even won 'best miracle worker' at the Natural Health Beauty Awards in 2008 – while its new Nail & Cuticle Oil was named Best Organic Beauty Product at Natural & Organic Awards Europe 2013. The packaging may have a more sophisticated appearance, and production has moved from the kitchen into the pristine conditions of a former goatshed, but little else has changed. Their methods remain low-tech – cotton pillowcases are used to strain each herbal infusion, and saucepans and catering mixers for combining them with other ingredients – and Paul and Carol are still committed to bringing customers the highest-quality products they can. And to mark Herbfarmacy's anniversary, they launched a baby care range and hosted tours of the farm.

When the picking season draws to a close, the Herbfarmacy team will begin to cover the land with green manures to fertilise it over winter, and in the new year they'll sow seed in polytunnels for planting out in spring. "It's a labour-intensive process because each product is at least a year in the making," Paul says, "but then that's how it should be. Harnessing the qualities of these ancient herbs is something that mustn't be rushed." ■

**i Herbfarmacy (01544 327371;**  
**herbfarmacy.co.uk).**





BEAUTY

# BEAUTY AND THE BEES

Helen Lowe's Welsh workshop becomes a hive of activity as she turns her honey, local goats' milk and fresh herbs into a range of soothing skincare products

WORDS BY KATE LANGRISH • PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER





**h**elen Lowe gently ushers a honeybee out of her workshop. “If they find out that this is where all their honey is, they’ll be in here demanding it back,” she says. Rosewater scent sweetens the air as she returns to bottling a fresh batch of body lotion, part of her aromatic range of beauty products derived from ingredients including her own honey and beeswax. Fortunately, her two hives lie in another part of the five-acre Welsh smallholding, just past the Anglo Nubian goats whose milk is used to make the soaps, and next to the vegetable garden containing the calendula, borage and rosemary she harvests for her creams. With views across the village of Sling in Gwynedd to the Menai Strait beyond, it’s easy to see why Helen is so inspired by natural produce. But, surprisingly, her passion actually started in an urban setting.

“I worked at G Baldwin & Co, London’s oldest medicinal herbalist. Many customers had West Indian, South American and African origins, and they introduced us to some of the plants they used for skincare,” Helen explains. “Twenty odd years ago, essential oils were unusual in the UK, and I’d spend quiet times ➡







experimenting with all the extracts that lined the shelves.” She started mixing up new recipes for soaps and creams on a Baby Belling hob in her one-bedroom flat. Carrying tubs of products back and forth to the shop in heavy rucksacks, she realised that the demand for her products meant she was outgrowing the space. So, in May 2004, when her parents decided to sell their farmhouse, Helen and her partner Ian took the opportunity to buy it and relocate.

### A RICH SOURCE

Since moving to Wales, they have a wealth of quality, wholesome ingredients on their doorstep. “We wanted to include goats’ milk because it’s a nourishing product, so I collect it from a dairy just up the road,” Helen says. The bees, however, were more of an accident: “I’d been speaking to the Conwy Beekeepers’ Association about getting a supply of wax and signed up for a course to learn how to keep them myself. Soon I had my own hive – the honey has excellent healing and therapeutic properties.”

The animals and insects at Laughing Bird Body Care HQ all have to earn their keep (even the three KuneKune pigs, Gilbert, Foxglove and Sweet Pea,

are dedicated Rotovators, preparing the meadows for planting the grass, and nothing goes into any of the jars and bars that doesn’t have a purpose. “I don’t add things simply to smell good,” Helen explains. “I pack in as many natural elements as possible, which is why the creams are absorbed by the skin and won’t clog up pores.”

Helen likes to make batches to order so customers can receive the products when they’re as fresh as possible. Once she has sliced off the capping wax to let the honey ooze out of the frames during the annual harvest in September, she then stores it and the beeswax in her workshop. After heating and mixing water, rooibos tea and beeswax in a stainless-steel bucket to make the body lotions, she stirs the honey in, along with essential oils, and leaves the blend to cool overnight before bottling it.

### GREEN CREDENTIALS

A firm believer in environmentally responsible and ethical practices, Helen uses Fairtrade shea and cocoa butter, and makes an annual donation to Bees for Development, an international charity that helps fight poverty by encouraging beekeeping projects. All packaging is recyclable and she’s sourcing

## Finding funding

Most small businesses begin with loans from family, redundancy settlements or credit cards. However, if you are struggling to find the cash, funding tends to be local or regionalised, specific to a sector or linked to current initiatives. Contact your council’s Business Development Team and be

tenacious: pots of money come and go. Sign up to newsletters from your industry sector and have a look at the Government’s grant finder facility ([gov.uk/business-finance-support-finder](http://gov.uk/business-finance-support-finder)), which lists funding, bursaries and loans. The Virgin Start Up Loan service ([virginstartup.org](http://virginstartup.org))

offers loans and mentoring. Crowdfunding is an especially effective way to raise capital, especially if you have a unique or community-based proposition ([crowdfunder.co.uk](http://crowdfunder.co.uk)). Collaborating and working co-operatively with other local businesses may mean that you have a

stronger case for a grant or funding. Finally, networking can help you find local pots of funding and tap into others’ knowledge. Women in Rural Enterprise (WiRE) has UK support networks, which help businesswomen in the countryside meet and help each other ([wireuk.org/networks](http://wireuk.org/networks)).



THE RANGE IS NOW  
SOLD AT FOUR NATIONAL  
TRUST PROPERTIES AS  
WELL AS AT LOCAL SHOPS,  
AND MARKETS AND BY  
MAIL ORDER

more and more ingredients from the surrounding area such as slate: “Clay is often used in soaps, but there isn’t any around here, so we wondered if this local rock would work instead. We went to our nearest quarry and ended up swapping some soaps for a bag of slate! It’s really effective at drawing out impurities and exfoliating.”

### CREATING A BUZZ

The Laughing Bird range is sold by mail order and at markets but can also be found in independent shops and four nearby National Trust properties. “My London-based business partner, Mark Thistlethwaite, who trained with me at G Baldwin & Co, deals with the sales side, so I can concentrate on the products. But we’ve been lucky – with existing loyal customers, we managed to get the business up and running with just a small loan,” Helen explains. “We have been in profit from our first year and now have two part-time assistants, Ali and Ann.”

In the summer Helen is busy juggling jobs – checking that the bees aren’t about to swarm, collecting the goats’ milk and harvesting the herbs. All this between mixing up batches and labelling jars for orders that are posted out twice a week but, on quieter days, she still loves to experiment in her workshop, a converted stable block behind the house: “I’m often here in a white coat and goggles, brewing up some new concoction. There’s a



footpath that goes past the house, so I do get funny looks from walkers, especially when they see me in my full-length bee suit.”

Helen admits that even when she’s doing what she enjoys most, it takes strength not to be lured out of the door by the view beyond. “In my London flat, I could work all day, as the only thing to look at was someone else’s house,” she says. “Here, I can see all the way to Puffin Island. I find myself venturing out and then checking on the hive. When it’s really busy, I have to close the door to concentrate!” And that keeps the bees off the scent, too. ☰

**i Laughing Bird Body Care**  
([laughingbird-bodycare.co.uk](http://laughingbird-bodycare.co.uk)).





## STEP-BY-STEP ADVICE #7:

# Managing your finances



**OPEN A SEPARATE BANK ACCOUNT FOR YOUR BUSINESS.** This is a legal requirement if you're running a limited company, but it makes good sense anyway to keep business transactions distinct from your personal ones. Most banks offer complementary business banking for 12-18 months, and there are free business accounts out there, too (try the Post Office and Santander; The Co-op is free for Federation of Small Businesses members).

**IT'S IMPORTANT TO NOTE INCOME.** Firstly, record how you receive your wages. Do you run a shop/stall, e-commerce site or do you invoice customers for your services? How do you record each sale and by what method? If you are running a shop/stall, you should note every sale, so a till is ideal. If this isn't practical, use a diary big enough to write down the sales as you take them. There are clever online solutions that let you run your till through a tablet, on or offline, such as [vendhq.com](http://vendhq.com), which also integrates with online accounting software, meaning very simple recordkeeping.

**IF YOU SEND ANY INVOICES,** you should do this as soon as possible and request short payment terms. Choose those of 14 days if you want to get paid in 30. Make sure you put all contact info and bank details on your invoice to get paid swiftly.

**NOTE YOUR INCOME AND EXPENDITURE AS YOU GO ALONG,** with a separate page or sheet for each week or month, with totals, and have a running total through your year. Review all the income and expenditure and see how you're doing.

**IF YOU ARE USING A BOOK OR SPREADSHEET,** you need to note the date, description, amount and method of payment for your shop/stall takings: the date, invoice number, customer, description, amount, method and date of payment. To make your invoicing and credit control easy and efficient, look at online software such as [xero.com](http://xero.com).

**YOU MUST ALSO KEEP RECORDS OF YOUR EXPENSES.** The sort of costs you can claim





**T**HERE IS NO SET WAY TO KEEP GOOD RECORDS, BUT IT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO DO SO. Not only will they give you an idea of how well you're doing, but are used by your accountant to complete the accounts and tax return. HMRC can enquire into any or every part of this document, so you will both need to show where the figures come from. In fact, you must keep your books for seven years.

include those incurred specifically for your business, such as stock for resale, materials to make your products, wages, rent, rates, insurances, printing, postage, stationery, telephone, advertising, travel, business mileage and equipment. However, it is wise to check with your accountant.

**YOU NEED TO RECORD SPECIFIC DETAILS:** date, supplier, description, amount, and method and date of payment. You also require extra columns, so you can see how much you have spent on stock, materials, wages, rent, rates, business insurances, printing, postage, stationery, telephone, advertising, travel and business mileage.

## WORKING OUT BUDGETS

**TO KNOW HOW MUCH YOU NEED TO COVER THE BILLS** and pay yourself, you need a budget. Ask yourself these questions: what are your monthly running costs? Include those you have to pay every month, eg wages, advertising, telephone and internet, insurances and software. What is your 'break-even'? This is the amount that your business needs to earn just to cover its costs.

**IF YOU PROVIDE SERVICES,** you should earn enough to cover your running costs. However, product-based businesses must sell enough to cover both these and your product costs. Your break-even is when your sales minus your product costs (your gross profit) equals your running costs. Bear in mind that this break-even doesn't provide for you to take anything from the business to live on. Now you can work out some simple budgets.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP GOOD RECORDS – THIS WILL GIVE YOU AN IDEA OF HOW WELL YOU ARE DOING, PLUS THEY ARE USED TO COMPLETE YOUR TAX RETURN BY YOUR ACCOUNTANT



# Open by your dream business

From a traditional tearoom to a quirky dog hotel, discover how to set up a bustling country enterprise







DREAM BUSINESS

# THE BOOKSHOP

Rosamund de la Hey and her husband Bill combined their passions for literature and food to open an award-winning bookstore, café, deli and homeware emporium in the Scottish Borders

WORDS BY KITTY CORRIGAN ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREW MONTGOMERY





The colourful window displays of The Mainstreet Trading Company in the Scottish Borders village of St Boswells are enough to lift the spirits on a dull day. This morning, art graduate Phillippa is putting the finishing touches to her depiction of *James and the Giant Peach*, papering and painting a large exercise ball, crafting origami out of vintage-style giftwrap and hanging a cardboard flock of sky-blue birds. As the scene takes shape, passers-by stop to admire it before being enticed inside by the aroma of Arabica coffee, and the promise of oven-fresh scones and cakes, served daily in the bookshop's in-house café. By lunchtime, loyal customers will be lining up for bowls of homemade soup, clutching their latest literary finds as they near the till, before relaxing at one of the many tables, tucked next to and among the bookcases.

## A NEW CHAPTER

For Rosamund de la Hey, it's a scene that rewards the hard work of the past seven years. A former marketing director for children's literature at Bloomsbury Publishing in London, she is as passionate about books as her husband Bill, formerly a photographer, is about food – combining these interests was always their plan. “The café has turned out to be a great boost for business,” Rosamund says. “It draws in people, who linger to browse the books.” Now, a deli and homeware store have been added, making Mainstreet a destination in itself. It is hardly a surprise that it has received national accolades, winning Independent Bookseller of the Year, Best Bookshop in the *Telegraph Magazine's* Best Small Shops in Britain Awards in 2012 and Deli of the Year in the Farm Shop and Deli Awards 2014.

Originally from Ayrshire, Rosamund always knew she'd return to Scotland, as she had a desire to raise her children, Wilfy, Isobel and Archie, in a more

rural location. So, after 13 years in the capital, the couple sold their flat and moved into a former manse one mile from St Boswells. Rosamund continued to commute at first, travelling three-and-a-half hours, three days a fortnight for her job. It was tiring but, she says, provided “perfect reading time” and an opportunity to refine her ambition of opening her own bookshop, a dream she'd been harbouring since childhood. “I used to sneak off in my grandmother's house to read behind a curtain,” she says. “It was bliss. I've always wanted to encourage that love in others.”

So when, in 2007, the auction house in St Boswells came up for sale, Rosamund and Bill saw it for its business potential. Even though the timing couldn't have been worse financially due to the collapse of Northern Rock and the start of the recession, they got a bank loan and an overdraft to buy and refurbish the 1890s property. It paid off – three years later, they were making a profit. Today,





the interior of Mainstreet is a blend of tongue-and-groove panelling, inviting seating and reclaimed furnishings. Books are everywhere – 7,500 titles are stocked, and there's an extensive calendar of events. Rosamund trusts the judgment of friends and former colleagues when it comes to choosing from new releases. There are two reading groups and bookcases on castors glide away to make space for author lunches, signings and cookery demonstrations. The café, meanwhile, is Bill's undertaking. He retrained as a chef at Edinburgh School of Food & Wine for the role. In November 2012, he opened a state-of-the-art deli in a converted barn behind the shop, stocking local and Scottish produce. Beyond the deli, the homeware store offers cashmere throws from Johnstons of Elgin next to ceramics, antiques and handmade books. There is potential for further expansion and Rosamund has plans for a cinema, inspired by the success of Hay-on-Wye's Booth's Bookshop. It may be off the beaten track but, like the famous book town in the Welsh Borders, St Boswells is heading for international stardom. ■

**i** *The Mainstreet Trading Company*  
(01835 824087; [mainstreetbooks.co.uk](http://mainstreetbooks.co.uk)).



## Our path to success



### HOW DO YOU ATTRACT CUSTOMERS TO A REMOTE LOCATION?

It's all about the shopping experience – if you make it enjoyable, your customers will then tell their friends and return themselves. Author events are a great way of generating local press interest and offering your customers something that Amazon can't, and the reading groups encourage a real sense of community, while building up a large customer email database at the same time.

### ARE E-BOOKS A CHALLENGE?

Fortunately, the sectors that have been most affected by e-books have been mass-market and erotic fiction, which aren't our areas. E-readers can co-exist but nothing compares to the joy of giving or receiving a real book. One of the most frequent comments we hear from customers is how much they enjoy

being in a 'proper' bookshop.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU'D KNOWN BEFORE STARTING?

How physical the work is – be prepared for tennis elbow and RSI! – and that funding isn't always worth the additional paperwork that it generates. We have grown organically as the business can afford it, so we aren't tied down by grant applications.

### WHAT SACRIFICES HAVE YOU MADE?

We haven't had a two-week break in five years and usually need to work weekends – we take it in turns so there's always someone at home with the children.

### ADVICE TO OTHERS?

Use social media to your advantage and develop an effective customer emailing list by handing out feedback forms at the till and encouraging people to sign up.



# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

## bookshop



### CREATE A FOLLOWING

**YOUR NICHE** Bookshops doing well in these challenging times know their market: they focus on a particular genre or subject matter. A good example of this is MX Publishing ([mxpublishing.co.uk](http://mxpublishing.co.uk)), a company that specialises in Sherlock Holmes. Such businesses promote themselves by building a profile with online fan groups, taking out Facebook ([facebook.com](http://facebook.com)) advertisements directed at people who have included Sherlock Holmes in their interests, and making the most of the surge of interest generated by a new television series.

**SOURCING STOCK** With your market defined, set up accounts with wholesalers such as Bertrams or Gardners, so you can order books at a

trade discount. These are on sale or return, which means you can see what's selling. For the second-hand book market, look for stock online and even in other shops.

**ONLINE SALES** Ahead of signing a long lease for premises, build a customer base on the internet. Look at template websites such as [moonfruit.com](http://moonfruit.com), [bigcartel.com](http://bigcartel.com) and [weebly.com](http://weebly.com), which enable you, for a small fee, to upload details of books and make sales without worrying about technical updates, as the website provider takes care of this. Include a newsletter sign-up option, as this will constitute your customer database later on.

**POP-UP SHOP** A temporary retail space is a great way of trying your presence on the high street without committing to the cost. Invite customers you've

gained online to meet you in the shop and develop your skills in presentation and customer service. Contact PopUp Britain ([startupbritain.co](http://startupbritain.co)), which is filling formerly vacant shops with small businesses. The budding entrepreneurs 'crowdfund' the rent (sourcing funds from a group of others, with each lending a proportion of the total) and learn from each other over a two-week trading period.

### OPEN YOUR DOORS

**LOCATION** When ready to take on your own premises, site it where there is good footfall and investigate being close to other bookshops so you benefit from the cluster effect most clearly seen in Hay-on-Wye, where they outnumber other stores. At this stage, seek help from a lawyer to negotiate the lease with the landlord and investigate sharing space with a co-tenant – perhaps a caterer to offer refreshments – so you share the costs, too.

**BIG IDEAS** Consider partnering with technology companies, which may contribute to the fees of the shop and give you an edge. For example, you could strike a deal with e-book publishers or e-reader manufacturers, or

experiment with customers buying out of hours by using QR (Quick Response) codes on displayed products. This can lead to extra income.

**PROMOTION** Host a launch and invite local and national media, plus an author or local dignitary to announce the shop open. Put on newsworthy events, too.

### REWARD CUSTOMERS

**OFFER DEALS** Encourage loyal shoppers with discounts. Most towns have their own apps on which you can target promotions.

**HOST EVENTS** Give people a reason to buy through hosting author events. The London group of independent shops Daunt Books ([dauntbooks.co.uk](http://dauntbooks.co.uk)) has these almost weekly. Charge a price to cover refreshments and offer incentives to attendees with deals on the day or night. Events also offer an opportunity to invite local media and bloggers.

**BOOST REVENUE** Could you host book-binding lessons, offer writing courses or a reading class for children? All will generate income and bring footfall to the shop. Develop these alongside web sales, which enable you to reach a larger audience, and you'll soon have a thriving business.



DREAM BUSINESS

# THE BED & BREAKFAST

Want to make money from the comfort of your home? Meet former nurse Marina Shellard, who took the plunge and set up a boutique B&B in the West Sussex countryside

WORDS BY EMMA PRITCHARD • PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLAIRE RICHARDSON





**W**elcome to Colliers Farm. Do come in!" That's the sort of warm greeting any visitor to Marina Shellard's B&B in the West Sussex village of Fernhurst will receive on arrival, along with a cup of Clipper tea and a slice of Victoria sandwich, baked fresh each morning. For at the heart of Colliers Farm, from the friendly reception to the stylish, comfortable accommodation, and, of course, the locally sourced breakfast, is Marina's nurturing, personal touch.

"I worked in palliative-care nursing for three years before opening this B&B," she says. "It was incredibly rewarding but also intense and stressful, and I knew it wasn't a career I could pursue long-term." Even more difficult if you have a family to look after, which, in Marina's case, consists of husband Russell and their seven children (six from the couple's previous marriages and one of their own), aged five to 25.

"We were living in a rented property in Haslemere, and looking for a place that was big enough for us all, when I began to wonder if we could run a B&B," Marina recalls. "I'd always loved the idea and soon realised that it was the only way we could afford a place with eight bedrooms."

### A DREAM HOME

In 2008, after a two-year search, Marina and Russell finally found their perfect property: a Grade II-listed, 16th-century farmhouse with outbuildings and eight acres of land. "The house hadn't been updated since the 1970s and needed modernisation. Fortunately, Russell has a construction company and he could see that the property had potential," she adds.

They combined savings with a large mortgage to finance the purchase, then, with Russell in between projects, had just one month, and a tight budget, to get the house fit for guests. "I was nursing full-time to pay the bills," ➔





AS THERE WERE ONLY THREE  
ROOMS, IT WASN'T NECESSARY  
TO GET PERMISSION TO RUN  
THE HOUSE AS A BUSINESS

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Marina says, “so Russell and the kids, who were on their summer holidays, did most of the manual labour, and I’d help out when I could.” Walls were stripped and replastered, carpets pulled up, an extra staircase built to create access to two rooms in the attic, and the entire house repainted. “I chose a neutral palette because I thought it would have a broader appeal,” she explains.

By July 2008, the farmhouse was ready for the Shellards to move into, although the final stage – converting the adjoining barn into a private kitchen and open-plan living area – took a further five months, as Russell had to juggle Colliers Farm with his day job. It was during this time that Marina handed in her notice and began sourcing the items she’d need to create her luxury B&B, including

Egyptian cotton towels and bathrobes, and toiletries by The White Company.

Colliers Farm has only three rooms to let, so it wasn’t necessary to get permission from the local authority to run the house as a business: “If we had four rooms or more, it would be classed as guest accommodation, which means obligatory fire doors and notices. We didn’t want that because, ultimately, this is our family home.”

Breakfast is something of an occasion at Colliers Farm, served by a woodburner in cold weather and out on the terrace in warmer months. Sausages and bacon are sourced from the Cowdray Estate, four miles away, tomatoes and mushrooms from the greengrocer’s in the village, and the eggs come from Marina’s own Sussex and Orpington hens and Khaki Campbell ducks. She also makes bread every evening to suit ➔







her guests' tastes. It's this attention to detail that is the key to Colliers Farm's 5\* Gold status from Visit England, which judges all aspects of a B&B, such as whether homemade biscuits are in the rooms, how much space there is beside each bed and the quality of the welcome. "The inspectors never tell you when they're going to come – our first guest turned out to be one!" Marina adds. Now, typical visitors include London professionals, holidaymakers from across the world and walkers keen to take advantage of the South Downs National Park: "When the area received its special status, we saw a boost to our bookings," Marina says, "although September, when the Goodwood Revival takes place, is still our busiest time."

As Colliers Farm is a 24/7 business, does Marina ever wish she could have a lie-in? "To do B&B properly, you need to devote yourself to it full-time. Fortunately, I'm at my most content when I'm looking after guests." This is clearly demonstrated by the visitors' book filled with positive comments, and the award plaque by the front door: "I am so grateful to have this career – I earn a living making people happy. What could be better than that?"

**i Colliers Farm (01428 652265;**  
**colliersfarm.co.uk).**

## My path to success

### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Having the confidence to open my doors to the public and let people into my home – it's very personal. I didn't have a guest book for the first six months because I hated the idea of receiving critical comments.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU'D KNOWN BEFORE STARTING?

That my own holidays would never be the same again – it's like the TV programme *Four in a Bed* whenever I go away now, because I find I'm always comparing the places we stay in with Colliers Farm and wondering if there's anything I could do to improve the service I offer.

### WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

I was incredibly pleased to be awarded the Gold Rating by Visit England in 2010. The official recognition that I was

doing a good job made all the hard work worth it.

I've also got its 5\* and Breakfast Awards – that's every accolade it offers!

### ADVICE TO OTHERS?

Make sure you assess your location first and think about who your market is going to be. We're based in a holiday hotspot, so are much busier at weekends with people looking for a luxury getaway. If we were nearer big businesses, though, we might have more corporate guests requesting cheaper, one-night stays.

### THE BEST THING ABOUT RUNNING A B&B?

You never know who's going to come through the door next. I love the excitement of meeting new people on a regular basis as well as building friendships with those who return every year.





# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

## *bed & breakfast*

### CHOOSE YOUR PREMISES

**PLANNING** Whether you want to turn your existing property into a B&B or are searching for a new house with the business in mind, consider how many rooms you will have for paying guests. It is a good idea to separate your own accommodation from that of your visitors, if you can, so provide them with a private living room, a bedroom and en-suite bathroom. You may also wish to consider soundproofing and installing security, plus disabled access.

**LEGAL REQUIREMENTS** Contact the local authority and register your business, then organise an inspection from an environmental health officer, who will ensure your kitchen is health and safety approved and can be used to cater for the public. There are no costs associated with registration or hygiene certification. Next, carry out a Fire Risk Assessment – visit the Bed & Breakfast Association for details ([bandbassociation.org](http://bandbassociation.org)).

**FINANCES** Draw up your projected income for the year ahead – how many guests do you hope to have and how much will they pay? List outgoings such as the costs of refurbishing,



catering, promotion, your salary (if you are taking one at the outset) and those of any extra staff. This will give you an idea of how much profit you can expect to make in the future. If you are unsure of the costs involved, you can sign up to a specialised course – try those run by Karen Thorne of the Bed & Breakfast Academy ([bedandbreakfastacademy.co.uk](http://bedandbreakfastacademy.co.uk)).

### WELCOME YOUR GUESTS

**YOUR MARKET** The kind of guest you intend to attract will influence how you promote and publicise your B&B as well as the facilities you'll need to offer. For example, if you want to be a getaway for active types, cycle storage and rambling

equipment is a must, while Wi-Fi is vital to those staying for business.

**REPRESENTATION** Register with travel agents who cater to your market as well as the local tourism board. Consider entering awards to bring credibility and ratings such as the Visit England Breakfast Award ([visitengland.org](http://visitengland.org)) or AA Hospitality Best B&B Award ([aahospitalityawards.com](http://aahospitalityawards.com)). Visit England is the body responsible for the 1-5 star rating system in the UK – pay for an inspection from an assessor (prices start at £102; [www.qualityintourism.com](http://www.qualityintourism.com)).

**ONLINE PRESENCE** Set up a website, where people can see your property and book. Include quality images of the rooms, the interior and exterior of the house, a map of how to reach you, and

listings of local attractions. Display customer testimonials, and any awards and ratings. To accommodate online bookings, consider investing in software services that have been created for the B&B sector, including Freetobook ([freetobook.com](http://freetobook.com)) and Bookingbug ([bookingbug.com](http://bookingbug.com)).

**SEASONAL OFFERS** Attract customers all year round by providing additional services such as trips and tours, and offer discounted stays to visitors if they come in quieter months.

**REPEAT BUSINESS** Give your guests a reason to return to your B&B by focusing on getting the basics right – a comfortable bed, quality breakfast and clean surroundings are essential. Make the stay memorable with personal touches such as homemade cake and biscuits in the room, providing toiletries and bathrobes, and being a friendly, attentive host who anticipates a guest's needs without being overbearing. Run a reward scheme for loyal visitors and stay in touch with them throughout the year by writing a blog, emailing a newsletter, using social media such as Facebook and Twitter, and adding pictures of your B&B on Pinterest.





## DREAM BUSINESS

# THE VILLAGE STORES

Alice Burnet and Andy Griffin have transformed a lacklustre shop and post office on the Norfolk coast into a wonderful destination for locals and holidaymakers alike

WORDS BY **ALEX REECE** ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY **BRENT DARBY**



There can't be many village shops that sell Monmouth coffee and scented candles along with the milk and papers, but the one in Stiffkey, Norfolk, does. This ingenious blend of convenience and lifestyle store, plus café and post office – housed in a flint-knapped former coach house near the sea – was created by owners Alice Burnet and Andy Griffin, who not only greet the steady stream of locals popping in for essentials by name, but also cater for visitors to Stiffkey (pronounced 'Stewkey') in search of buckets and spades.

What is even more remarkable is that Alice and Andy took on the business when they were both just 24, after quitting the capital for a new life. "In London, we were working all hours to pay the rent on a studio flat," remembers Alice, now 33, who sold bread for artisan bakers Flour Power City Bakery, while Andy designed vehicles for the MoD in Surrey. "After a year in the job, I realised I didn't want to be stuck in an office all day," he says. So the pair began hatching plans for their own enterprise.

In September 2006, on a trip to see Alice's aunt in Norfolk, the couple





STIFFKEY  
STORES

INCREDIBLE  
EDIBLES  
LOCAL  
PRODUCE  
HOME &  
GARDEN  
CHILDRENS



NEWSPAPERS  
*This Way...*



"WE SELL  
NOSTALGIC BOOKS  
AND, WHEREVER  
I GO, I BUY NICE  
GREETINGS CARDS"





visited Stiffkey, and admired the traditional buildings and coastal location. The following Monday, while looking at properties online, Andy discovered that the village stores was for sale. Although the interior, with its vinyl flooring and strip lighting, looked tired, he and Alice spotted the potential to do more with the courtyard (then a parking area) and barn, used for storage. “It was too good an opportunity to miss,” Andy says.

With the money Andy had saved since boyhood, they bought the lease and opened in November. First, they worked out the grocery and newspaper orders, then Andy was trained as a sub-postmaster. In the spring, the couple renovated the Victorian coach house, running the shop from a back room until the work was done. Andy took out the suspended ceilings to reveal original beams and used

vintaged crates coloured with Farrow & Ball paints for displaying goods.

### ALL CHANGE

They started altering the stock, too, introducing more produce from Norfolk suppliers such as Husk, a wood-fired bakery in Heydon, and The North Norfolk Fish Company in Stiffkey, along with local vegetables, fruit and flowers. However, the incomers faced some resistance. “People like things the way they are,” says Alice, who recalls one woman angrily confronting her in the street, threatening to turn the village against them if they continued to change the shop.

This opposition might have defeated less-determined entrepreneurs, but Alice and Andy never doubted they were doing the right thing. When the holiday season arrived, and the nearby campsite was full, they were amazed at

how busy they became – 500 to 600 customers is now typical on a summer’s day compared with 30 in winter.

Encouraged by their success, the couple bought a coffee machine and began baking cakes in an oven beneath the counter to add a café strand to the business. Customers can sit at a table inside the shop or out in the courtyard where ‘beach huts’ provide shelter. The range of gifts and homeware, which Alice sources at trade shows and craft markets, evolved over time: “We sell nostalgic books and, wherever I go, I buy nice greetings cards.” Everything is hand-picked, including the cushions, toiletries and garden products sold in the barn, which they restored in 2008.

An average day involves 11 hours in the shop, followed by accounts, orders and emails at home in Gunthorpe, a ten-minute drive away. Then there are trips to the cash-and-carry to buy ➞



stock. "It's not just a job, it's a way of life," Andy says.

Despite the odd setback, their dedication paid off, converting many doubters. Now, older residents swap news in the courtyard and mums meet for coffee. Following the arrival of daughter Clementine, now aged four, the couple's routine changed as Alice worked from home more often. The shop is cleverly arranged so one person can operate the till, coffee machine and adjacent post-office counter, while the barn is self-service. But, for the first time, the couple have help in the stores two days a week, so they can enjoy some family time together along with their French bulldog, Pumpkin.

With Stiffkey Stores established, the pair are now looking to the future. They plan to launch a website to sell gifts and home accessories, and hope to open a lifestyle shop. For the moment, though, the tables and chairs are out, and the shop is all set for another busy summer. ■

**Stiffkey Stores** (01328 830489; [stiffkeystores.com](http://stiffkeystores.com)).



## Our path to success



### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

It has been much more demanding on our time than we had first envisaged. Since we've had Clementine, it's been even trickier to get that balance between family and work.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU'D KNOWN BEFORE STARTING?

I think we were rather naïve imagining that everyone in the village was going to embrace the changes to the shop and our ideas about how things could be done differently. Some locals absolutely loved it and have ever since, but it did upset others – we weren't really prepared for that.

### WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

When we reopened the renovated part of the shop – it provided us with a little insight into how the business was going

to be in the future. Also, it's so satisfying when customers tell us they appreciate what we do and when we meet like-minded people.

### WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO OTHERS?

You have to be fully committed. People think running a shop is lovely but, for the first few years, we were here virtually all the time. Behind the scenes, it is very hard graft. Also, it takes a while to get the mix of what you sell just right. Stick with it and go with your gut instinct. If you can commit all your energy to it, you'll be able to make it work eventually.

### WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT RUNNING A VILLAGE STORES?

Apart from being our own bosses, it's the variety of our stock. I like the fact that we sell food alongside games, books and cards.



# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

## *village stores*

### RESEARCHING THE MARKET

**LOCAL NEEDS** Whether you are buying an existing business or launching a new one, it's vital to understand the needs of the village to help you decide what to sell. Post questionnaires (with an incentive) through residents' letterboxes or knock on doors to introduce yourself and conduct a survey. Cover topics such as the importance of local food or household items and the prices they are prepared to pay for goods and services. Find out what people liked and disliked about the stores under the previous owners. Extend your enquiries to the surrounding communities whose residents could be your customers, too.

**PREMISES** If you are taking over the village stores, study the accounts and seek advice from an accountant to ensure you are paying the right price. With a new venture, consider any other shops in your village; avoid crossover with them but try to stock complementary products. Contact local estate agents to find out what's on the market. Or visit sites such as [uk.businessesforsale.com](http://uk.businessesforsale.com), [businessesforsale.com](http://businessesforsale.com) and [rightmove.co.uk](http://rightmove.co.uk). If possible,

get to know the landlord, who may be open to offers, especially if the property has been empty for a while.

### SETTING UP

**SUPPLIERS** When acquiring stock, assess how much artisan and fresh produce you require and which items will come from wholesalers such as Costco or Booker (based on your research). For local food, seek out growers and producers, visit farmers' markets ([farma.org.uk](http://farma.org.uk)) and browse websites that list suppliers in your area ([bigbarn.co.uk](http://bigbarn.co.uk)). Discover craftspeople through events and [etsy.com](http://etsy.com). You could display produce on furniture made by nearby makers and hang work by the area's artists on the walls, with all items available to buy.

**SERVICES** Having a Post Office, too, will be an attraction for customers, especially if there isn't one in the area already. Find out how to set it up at [corporate.postoffice.co.uk/business-opportunities](http://corporate.postoffice.co.uk/business-opportunities). Along with magazine and newspaper orders and a community noticeboard, dry cleaning, photocopying, a book exchange and a computer with internet access will provide more reasons for locals to drop in.

**PREPARATION** Public liability insurance is essential so you are protected in the event of any injuries or incidents on the shop floor. Allocate budget for fixtures, fittings and decoration, and staffing if needed. If there isn't one already, you'll need to invest in a payment system. Consider products such as Intuit Pay, which works via a smartphone. Next, you'll need to spend time pricing your stock.

### OPENING YOUR DOORS

**TRADING** Attract repeat custom with new activities such as 'meet the producer' events. If relevant, gauge demand for extending opening hours for

commuters. Make the most of feedback from anyone who comes in each day and ask for their views on what else they would like to see or buy from you. Broadcast deals of the day on Twitter, set up a board for your store on Pinterest and create a presence for the shop on Facebook (Facebook ads can target people living in the surrounding area, too). Invest in smart-looking carrier bags so customers use them again and become walking advertisements.

**JOINING FORCES** Partner with local retailers to put on village events and, if there isn't one already, form a shopkeepers' group so you can pool resources and ideas to attract more people.





## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE #8:

# *Being aware of the regulations*

**EVERY ENTERPRISE MUST COMPLY WITH CERTAIN GUIDELINES.** Try to think about it positively: the rules are there to protect you and the business, and give customers confidence in your product. Establish exactly which regulations apply to you. The Government has catalogued most of the regulations that businesses must comply with ([gov.uk/browse/business](http://gov.uk/browse/business)) and the major ones are outlined here. Contact your local council's business support team or online forums to ensure you're aware of those relevant to your start-up. If you feel yourself getting overwhelmed, be positive – these rules are a barrier to businesses doing similar things to you, but most of them don't get this far, so you are already out in front.

**WHEN MAKING MAJOR ALTERATIONS TO YOUR PREMISES TO ACCOMMODATE YOUR BUSINESS,** or if customers will be visiting you, contact your

local council about planning permission or relevant licences. Business rates may apply on some part of your home/office and you will definitely need public liability insurance at the very least. Make a note to discuss these matters and tax allowances with your accountant.

**BUSINESS TAX WILL BE RELEVANT** (see 'Managing your finances', p180) but in the first instance, keep records and receipts for everything (bus tickets, till receipts, energy bills, etc). Now that you are running a business, some of your expenditure is the cost of doing business, and that means it can be subtracted

from your sales before you work out how much tax you owe. If your sales are less than £81,000 per year, you should not need to register for VAT but there are some situations when you might want to. As a small business owner, you don't have to have an accountant but if dealing with numbers and tax isn't in your comfort zone, outsource from the beginning. Accountants do not charge heavily for sole traders and small limited companies, and they often save you money and can guide you to make the best financial decision.

**THERE ARE PLENTY OF RULES AROUND EXPENSES AND**

**EMPLOYEE BENEFITS.** However, you do not need to deal with any immediately, unless you have employees (see [gov.uk/browse/employing-people](http://gov.uk/browse/employing-people)). Again, don't forget to keep any receipts.

**THERE ARE A NUMBER OF GUIDELINES SURROUNDING BEAUTY BUSINESSES.** Any products that customers put on their skin must comply with the law. Even if you are making and selling on a small scale, your lotions and potions are bound by the Cosmetic Products Regulations at [legislation.gov.uk](http://legislation.gov.uk) and each one must be uploaded to the Central Notification Portal at [cosmeticsafetyassessment.com](http://cosmeticsafetyassessment.com). Most of these processes only have to be done once per item and your customers will be reassured that you have reached the highest standards and that they are therefore protected. See the Guild of Craft Soap & Toiletry Makers' website ([gcstm.co.uk](http://gcstm.co.uk)).

**CONSIDER DATA PROTECTION AND THE SALE OF GOODS AND SERVICES.** The rules about advertising, labelling and weights and measures will apply to almost any food business. But most enterprises are affected by these regulations to some extent – often you don't have to do anything official other than be aware of the guidelines and structure your business accordingly.





**THE MOST HEAVILY REGULATED INDUSTRY IS FOOD-CATERING AND RETAIL.** You will have to register with the council, so make friends with your local environmental health officer from the start. Read up on labelling before you finalise your recipes. Health and safety is controlled by the Food Standards Agency – its website is a mine of information ([food.gov.uk](http://food.gov.uk)). You will need to make a plan for Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP), which can be created online at [myhaccp.food.gov.uk](http://myhaccp.food.gov.uk).

**WHETHER OR NOT YOU NEED A LICENCE DEPENDS ON YOUR INDUSTRY.** Food companies are tightly controlled and these matters are managed by your council (there is a link to apply directly). Most businesses will not need one.

**THE VITAL DECISION YOU NEED TO MAKE WHEN SETTING UP** is whether to establish yourself as a sole trader or a limited company. Again, discuss this with an accountant (and see the start-up section) – it's not complicated but, since it is a legal requirement, it's best to get it right from the beginning.

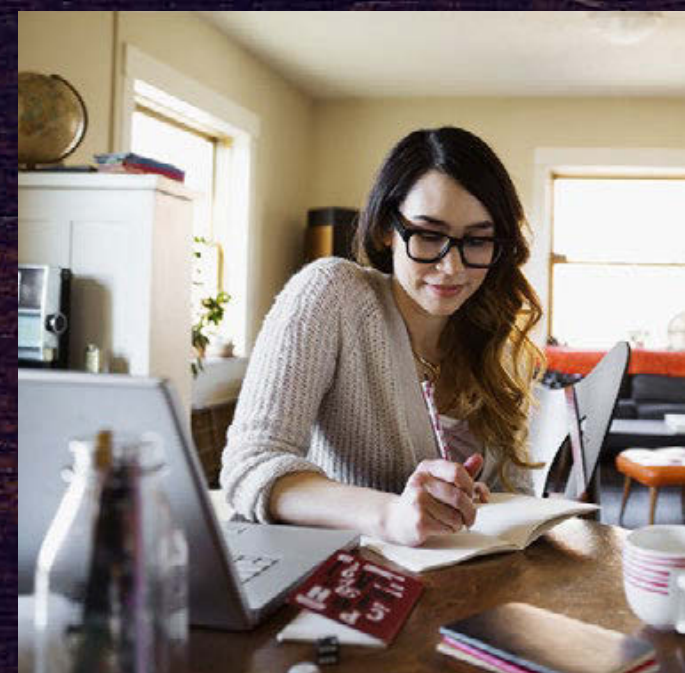
**REGISTERING A TRADE MARK ISN'T A REGULATION,** but make yourself aware of the facts around Intellectual Property (IP) and Trademarks. There is a guide at [gov.uk/how-to-register-a-trade-mark](http://gov.uk/how-to-register-a-trade-mark) and at the British Library ([bl.uk/bipc/protideas](http://bl.uk/bipc/protideas)). However, it can be expensive, it doesn't always afford absolute protection and it can create a massive barrier to launching. This works both ways; if you infringe someone else's IP (Intellectual Property) or Trademark (even if a design or a picture), you could be forced to change your products or branding.

## HOW TO SURVIVE THEM

**IF YOU CAN CLEARLY SEE FROM THE DETAILED DOCUMENTATION THAT YOU DON'T NEED SOMETHING,** make a note of the fact that you have reviewed the requirement and why you have come to this decision (a reference to a council web page or a government document). In those instances when you are not sure, ask the provider (the council or government department usually). If they agree that you don't need one, request confirmation in writing (email is fine).

**DON'T PROCRASTINATE!** Just tackle the paperwork and make a note to chase it up with the council. Continue until it's done, keep records and note when annual renewals are due.

**THERE ARE PLENTY OF RESOURCES TO HELP YOU** A good place to start is usually with the Business Support Helpline (0300 456 3565).





**b**ats swoop silently through the air and the only sound is that of a tawny owl hooting in the twilight.


Sipping cider around a campfire under a starlit sky, a group of friends are planning the next day's adventures. Behind this idyllic scene are two hard-working women whose business is other people's holidays. Running a new glamping site in Herefordshire, Sacha Morley and Jo Pilkington's busiest season is, naturally, the summer.

### KINDRED SPIRITS

The pair, who have seven daughters between them, aged four to 12, launched Mad Dogs & Vintage Vans after meeting at the school gate and discovering that they both wanted to build a business around family life. Jo had given up an 18-year broadcasting career in London to move to The Old Rectory in the village of Brampton Abbots in 2009 and, with her music entrepreneur husband Al, set to work renovating it. By the end of the costly project, they needed the house and large garden to







DREAM BUSINESS

# THE GLAMPING SITE

Having discovered that they shared an enthusiasm for vintage caravans and the Herefordshire countryside, Sacha Morley and Jo Pilkington set up a holiday company with a difference

WORDS BY KITTY CORRIGAN ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY CLAIRE RICHARDSON





THEY BEGAN THEIR RESEARCH BY STAYING AT OTHER SITES AND DECIDED TO SET THEMSELVES APART BY OFFERING ACTIVITIES SUCH AS FORAGING



earn them money. At the time, Sacha, Wye Valley born and bred, was a full-time mother to her four girls. She'd recently restored a 1950s caravan named Elsie with the intention of hiring it out, but didn't have suitable land. Jo suggested relocating it to two acres of her grounds – and from there the idea for a full-scale glamping enterprise started to take shape.

They began their research by staying at other sites. "There were already tipis, bell tents and yurts nearby, so we went for boutique caravans," Jo says. To help boost income and set themselves apart from the competition, they decided to offer activities such as den-building for children and foraging.

### SETTING TO WORK

Sacha, her builder partner Steve and Jo then spent 18 months buying, restoring and fitting out three more vans and preparing the communal areas, each of the women ploughing equal amounts of their savings into purchasing the caravans from ebay and creating the facilities. "The overall cost of renovating these vans has never scared us," Sacha says, "because we buy only collectable, British-made designs that hold their value."

Not all the projects have been plain sailing, however. "Just as we'd



# Our path to success

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## WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

The weather – but, unlike tents, at least our vans are off the ground so there is no danger of a soggy bottom! And it is lovely to hear the pitter-patter of raindrops when you're snugly curled up under a thick duvet.

## WHAT DO YOU BOTH WISH YOU'D KNOWN BEFORE STARTING?

That even after all the research we'd done, our soft launch last year would be such a baptism of fire. The most nerve-wracking time was when we signed up with Sawday's Canopy & Stars and the inspectors came to stay. But we were thrilled to pass with flying colours.

## WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST HIGHLIGHT?

A real boost is seeing the result of all our hard work – guests arrive tired and stressed, but within 24 hours they're enjoying the simple pleasures that camping outdoors can bring.

## WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT RUNNING A GLAMPING SITE?

Having a good excuse to explore the local salvage and reclamation yards to source fixtures and fittings, buying bargains at auctions

and online, and then decorating the caravans with our vintage finds. We had a lot of fun using funky, unusual items, including the pink washstand in the shower shack.

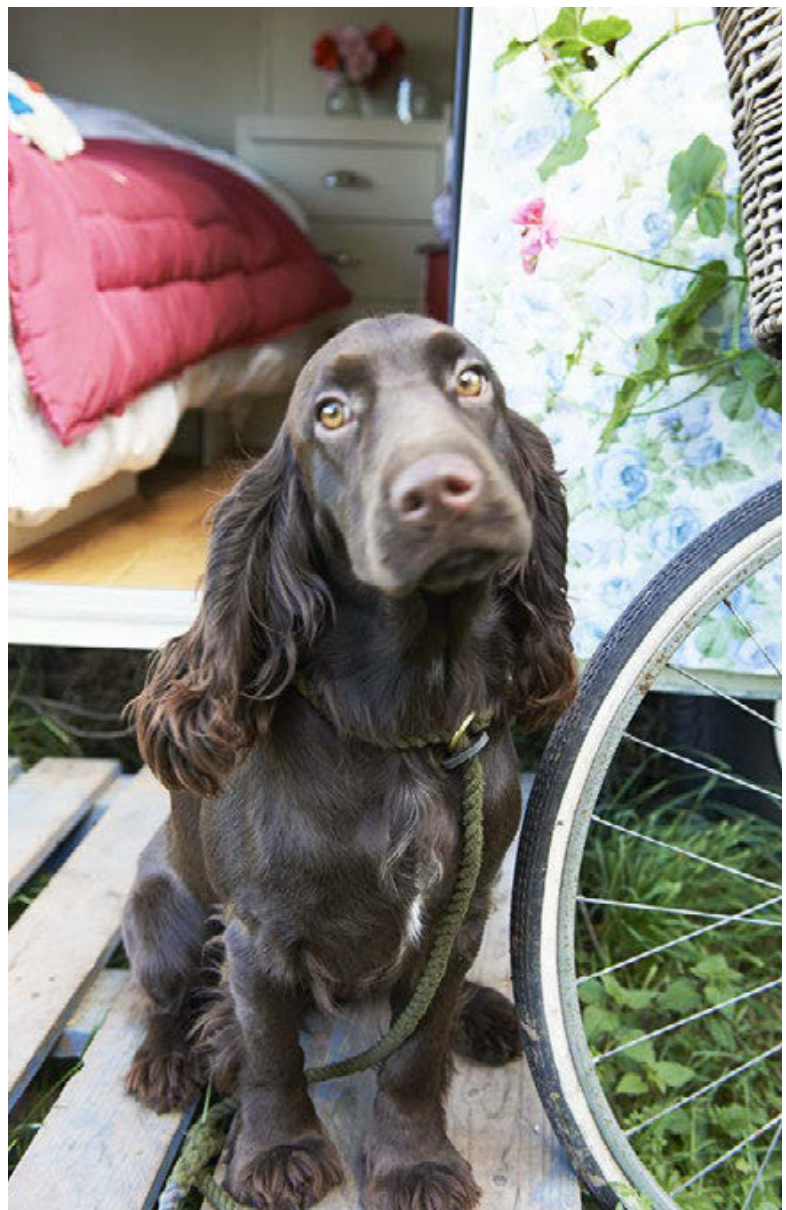
## DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR OTHERS WANTING TO HIRE OUT RUSTIC RETREATS?

Try other glamping sites and pick up tips

for your own. We went to one with another friend and 11 children aged one to nine, and learned about all the boring but important things such as drainage!











completed fitting out a rare caravan called Gloria, a tree smashed through the roof in February 2014,” Jo says. “Mercifully, no one was injured, but the van was beyond repair.” The replacement turned out to be Monty, a characterful former military wagon. Alongside Elsie and Monty, the entrepreneurs have also fitted out Darcy, a rare 1957 model furnished with Laura Ashley upholstery, and Gertie, which dates back to the 1930s.

Changeover days are the most exhausting because they do everything themselves. “We strip beds, launder, iron, clean the shower shack – and, of course, top up the marshmallows for toasting on the fire!” Jo says.

In the autumn, the business quietens down but then Jo and Sacha will be preparing for their next season’s guests: “It’s a time to pick fruit and make preserves,” Jo adds. ■

**i Mad Dogs & Vintage Vans**  
([maddogsandvintagevans.co.uk](http://maddogsandvintagevans.co.uk)).





DREAM BUSINESS

# THE DOG HOTEL

A passion for pets inspired one ex-office worker to set up a small-scale home-boarding service in the West Sussex countryside, offering her canine guests everything they could wish for

WORDS BY RUTH CHANDLER ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALUN CALLENDER





freshly baked biscuits, luxurious beds, bespoke accessories and access to a private 350-acre estate: perks that any boutique-hotel owner would be proud to offer their guests. But these benefits come as standard at the establishment run by Caroline Patey-Johns, who is passionate about catering for the needs of her canine clients. Based in a semi-detached tile-hung cottage in the West Sussex countryside, which she shares with her partner Ben, daughter Robyn, 19, and son Charlie, 16, Caroline earns an income by caring for other people's pets while they are away.

"The idea came to me after doing a dog-grooming course and being made redundant from my job at a financial services recruitment company," says Caroline, sitting at her kitchen table, as Basil – one of her whippets along with Flippit and Seb – rests his chin on her knee. She strokes his silky blonde



"TO KEEP TO A MANAGEABLE NUMBER, I DECIDED ON AN  
AVERAGE OF FOUR CANINE GUESTS, AND LIMITED OUR INTAKE  
TO WHIPPETS, GREYHOUNDS AND LURCHERS"

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ears and continues: “I found that fellow owners were as reluctant as us to go on holiday and leave their dogs in a large-scale kennel – there was a gap in the market for a home-boarding business in my area. Initially, I limited our intake to sighthounds, a group that includes whippets, greyhounds and lurchers – as they share the same gentle temperament, so would get on with our three. I then decided on an average of four guests.”

Indi, a small blue whippet with patches of white fur and particularly soulful brown eyes, is Caroline’s most frequent visitor, arriving at 8am every weekday as her Brighton-based owner drops her off on the way to work. Most of Caroline’s business is from holidaymakers, however. The combination of The Whippet Hotel’s proximity to Gatwick Airport, its growing reputation and strong presence on Twitter and Facebook means that her bookings come from as far afield as Berlin. “Some people travel from abroad to see family and leave their dogs in our care, while others bring them on the way to catching their flight.”

### PREPARING THE PREMISES

Set-up costs for this kind of enterprise are low – Caroline used £3,000 of her savings to prepare her home to receive canine visitors. The largest outlays were the installation of gates to secure the garden from the drive that leads to the farm – two to create a vestibule in between, which provides another layer of security – and adding closed-board fencing around the perimeter – though the cottage’s position away from a busy road makes its location ideal. Additional purchases since opening include tags that read ‘Guest of The Whippet Hotel’ and bear its telephone number and postcode (in case a dog bolts on a walk), and the design and printing of business cards. Caroline also needed to take out general liability insurance to cover any accidental damage to her house and its contents, and obtain a home-boarding

licence from the local council. “There’s very little regulation in this industry, so you have to rely on your common sense and understanding of a pet’s needs to ensure you’re offering a good service.”

### AN INSTANT HIT

Within the first few weeks, Caroline felt confident about the appeal of her business: dozens of owners booked in their pets, willing to pay £22 for an overnight stay so they didn’t have to use large impersonal kennels. The fact that Caroline is happy to cater for every whim only increases its popularity: “If a dog sleeps on its owner’s bed and they want it to do so on ours, that’s fine.” And regular visitor Stanley must always have his daily treat of a chew ➞





## My path to success



### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Social media. I knew it would help me make a success of my business, but I didn't understand how to use it. Robyn and Charlie helped and I initially invested four hours a day on Facebook and Twitter. Now I'm quicker and receive 70 per cent of my business through these networks.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU'D KNOWN BEFORE STARTING?

That so many people wanted this kind of service. I was prepared for quiet spells but it's been busy from the start and we're booked five months ahead.

### WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

Hearing from a Brighton-based woman to whom my business had been recommended by three

different Whippet Hotel clients. I also had a booking from someone in London who had heard about us from a fellow sighthound owner while walking her dog on Hampstead Heath.

### WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT YOUR JOB?

Earning a living working from home surrounded by my favourite kind of animal. I really couldn't ask for more and I'm aware of how lucky I am.

### DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR OTHERS WHO WOULD LIKE TO DO THE SAME THING?

Specialise in a particular breed or family of animal. There is a natural limit for the business – the maximum number of pets you can take in – so work out if you can make a living based on this before you begin.

– his steady stare at the customary time means there's no risk of this being forgotten. "I love getting to know each dog's idiosyncrasies," Caroline says.

She begins each day by serving her guests breakfast and takes them into the garden, two at a time so she can keep an eye on their behaviour. With the help of Robyn, she walks the dogs twice a day on the lead through the land of the nearby farm. Then there is time for administrative tasks such as taking bookings, responding to enquiries and billing clients, plus social media, and tea at 6pm. Due to the nature of her business, she works a seven-day week and must be at home during all that time except for the occasional two or three hours when Robyn or Ben can step in. Does she feel trapped? "Never. I love being based at home and it still doesn't feel like a job," says Caroline, as she removes a tray of freshly baked peanut butter bone-shaped dog biscuits from the oven. "I've been asked in all seriousness by dog owners whether we can take human guests. They like the idea of a restful retreat complete with the soothing company of whippets! We might consider it one day." ≡

**i** *The Whippet Hotel* (01444 258339; [thewhippethotel.co.uk](http://thewhippethotel.co.uk)).





# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP

## *pet service*

### GET STARTED

**TRY TO BE OBJECTIVE** Retain your business head – it's easy to forget about profit when looking after pets, as they inspire so much warmth and affection in us. Remember that you need to earn a living.

**GAIN NEW SKILLS** There aren't any specific qualifications required for working with dogs or other pets; however, this doesn't mean you shouldn't grasp any opportunity to gain a kitemark, certificated practical experience or a diploma, which will all prove your passion and conscientiousness.

#### **LEARN ABOUT PETS**

Reading widely to gain an understanding of canine communication and behaviour patterns will make your work easier and is a great way to attract new customers.

**ABIDE BY THE LAW** As the business owner, you should be aware of the legal and practical issues concerned. Read all relevant parts of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (search the title at [legislation.gov.uk](http://legislation.gov.uk)) and reference it in your marketing material – it will be a comfort to pet owners that you understand the regulations. Also make sure



you have the correct insurance and have all eventualities covered.

### DO THE PAPERWORK

**LOCATION** Any facility looking after animals must hold a licence that has been granted by the local council under the Animal Boarding Establishments Act. This will ensure you have achieved the national standards regarding the space per dog, health and safety, disposal of waste, feeding, illness and accident reporting.

### GROW YOUR BUSINESS

**SET UP A SHOP** Bring in extra income by selling luxury canine accessories, toys and treats that customers can

reward their dog with at the end of their stay.

**PROVIDE SERVICES** Become qualified in grooming on a City & Guilds course and offer to pamper pets while they are in your care. Services could range from a wash and dry to pedicures and full-body treatments. Find relevant courses at [petcare.org.uk](http://petcare.org.uk).

**BE PERSONAL** Make a note of each dog's birthday and send a card or gift, using a photo of the customer's dog or their name. A little investment will result in loyalty and a more secure income. Treat clients well and they will return to you.

**ENCOURAGE RECOMMENDATIONS** Introduce a referral rewards scheme so your satisfied customers will encourage

their friends to use your business, too.

### HONE YOUR TALENT

Whether you want to start a business or develop a skill, there's a course for you...

**JAN FENNELL, THE DOG LISTENER, NATIONWIDE** Jan's trained Dog Listeners teach foundation courses in her approach called Amichien Bonding, which is a way for owners to understand and address canine non-medical behavioural problems and assert your position as pack leader. Online sessions and other courses to become a professional trainer are also available (01724 761764; [janfennellthedoglistener.com](http://janfennellthedoglistener.com)).

#### **THE COLLEGE OF ANIMAL WELFARE, NATIONWIDE**

Discover how to become a professional dog groomer, animal handler, care worker or RSPCA inspector, and gain City & Guilds qualifications at this dedicated learning centre (01480 422060; [caw.ac.uk](http://caw.ac.uk)).

#### **TRUFFLE HUNTERS DOG SCHOOL, SOMERSET**

Marion Dean shows you how to train your hound in unearthing these culinary treasures by scent work. Advanced sessions to enable dogs to work in a commercial setting are also offered (01935 824316; [trufflehuntersdogschool.com](http://trufflehuntersdogschool.com)).



## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE #9:

# Seeking support to ensure success

**MAKE NO MISTAKE: BEING YOUR OWN BOSS IS LONELY.** Yes, you have friends and family but you no longer have the network of colleagues you enjoyed before. With these people, you shared a commonality in the business and an interest in its success. You consulted with them and worked collaboratively towards common goals (financial or otherwise). This is exactly what you need when you are new to business, a place to mull over ideas to get inspiration and an informed but impartial person to share your concerns with.

**DON'T THINK THAT NETWORKING IS JUST ABOUT DOING BUSINESS.**

Successful enterprises recognise that those who are more experienced are the best source of skills and information, so spending time with the like-minded founders of businesses is crucial to survival. Perhaps the most valuable part of networking is recommendations; most

**T**HE SECRET IS RECOGNISING THAT YOU NEED HELP BEFORE YOU REACH CRISIS POINT. Define what sort of assistance you need. For specific issues, a business advisor can usually be found via your local council's business support team, or try the Government-sponsored mentoring and growth advice programme ([marketplace.enterprisenation.com](http://marketplace.enterprisenation.com)). For many businesses, however, a local network of businesses and like-minded entrepreneurs that you trust and respect may be the best place to find help. Successful networking is about building relationships and supporting each other's businesses.

people network generously and will willingly share contacts, the best web developer or accountant, for example – saving you time and costly mistakes. Be prepared to share your contacts as well – it's a two-way process.

**IT IS IMPORTANT TO INVEST IN NETWORKING, TAKING TIME TO FIND THE RIGHT ONE FOR YOU**

and keep going regularly. Your local Chamber of Commerce will almost

certainly have a series of networking meetings ([britishchambers.org.uk](http://britishchambers.org.uk)), but check out others, too. Also, look for sector- and gender-specific networks; creative, food and product businesses often feel like a fish out of water at business service-type networks. Don't give up, though, as there is a network for everyone. However, if you can't find what you are looking for, you could always start one for the founders of similar

businesses – Women in Rural Enterprise ([wireuk.org](http://wireuk.org)) can help. View networking as a long-term plan, something that you make a point of slotting into your routine regularly.

**YOU CAN LEARN TO INTERACT.**

It may seem like the most natural thing on earth, but successful networking does take practice. Networking can also be frightening – walking into a room where you know no one and starting to talk with a stranger takes most of us out of our comfort zone. Conversation starter staples are fine (such as comments about the weather and traffic), but if possible try to learn a little bit about the group members in advance or find some mutual connections. Be clear about your expectations, whether that's finding support and contacts or just getting away from your desk for a while. Then learn your pitch, just 60 seconds, clear and warm. The best ones are a story;



# HOW TO NETWORK EFFECTIVELY

**TREAT OTHER PEOPLE** as you'd wish to be treated and keep your word. If you say you'll do something, do it.

**THINK ABOUT** what you can do for those you are networking with, not just what they can do for you.

**CHOOSE A GROUP** of people who have standards and ethics you believe in – you'll do better business.

**REMEMBER** it's about building relationships – not lists of contacts. You wouldn't spam your friends, so don't spam your network.

**ENCOURAGE** creative discussion and debate even if it doesn't directly and immediately affect your business.

**MAKE SURE** you always have your business cards with you and keep them in your pocket to avoid rummaging in your handbag.

**SPREAD THE WORD** – invite others who may get support from your network.

**TELL PEOPLE** what you are looking for and how they could help you.

**BE POSITIVE**, friendly and have purpose. Go out of your way to be helpful.

**UNDERSTAND** what others are looking for and if you can't help, connect them with people who can.

**LEARN HOW TO 'MOVE ON'** kindly; get something to eat or drink, introduce the person you've been talking with to someone else, then slip away.



## RECOGNISE THAT IT IS NOT JUST ABOUT YOU.

Your networking contacts need to get something out of the relationship as well, so listen in return. Don't make snap decisions; you may not be able to do dealings directly but remember that more than 70 per cent of new business is actually gained through word of mouth.

why you started and what it means to you. This will enable you to grab the listener's imagination and to then expand on it.

shows that you have valued the time spent together and that you're keen to work with them in the future.

**DON'T BE AFRAID TO CALL A PERSON YOU HAVE MET IF SOMETHING OCCURS TO YOU LATER** or if you want to chat to someone else in the same situation. Many of your fellow networkers will also be based at home, and are likely to appreciate the chance to talk to another new entrepreneur in the same boat.

**WHAT HAPPENS AT A NETWORKING EVENT IS ONLY HALF THE STORY.** Following up is really important – a quick email to say how nice it was to meet or, even better, a tweet that references a person's or enterprise's handle means that you start to cement the relationship. It



## DREAM BUSINESS

# THE SWEET SHOP

Angela Spencer has enjoyed a sweeter life since setting up her emporium near York, where she serves locals their favourite treats, from flying saucers to artisan chocolates

WORDS BY CATHERINE BUTLER ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRENT DARBY

There's a new mouse-shaped hero in Easingwold. His turned-up nose, plump body and squiggly tail has inspired quite a following in this North Yorkshire market town. "It's amazing how popular the Sugar Mouse logo has become," says ex-newspaper journalist Angela Spencer, who opened a sweet shop near York two-and-a-half years ago. "All the children want to come to us because they love our mascot." So much so that when it snowed here last winter, the streets were lined with snowmice, not snowmen. The hearts of

Easingwold's under-12s, however, are not the only ones to have been won over by this old-fashioned sweet store. Teenagers, parents and grandparents can regularly be found buying bags of their favourite sherbet lemons, jelly beans and Yorkshire Mixture (hard-boiled candies), all displayed in vintage-style jars, or enjoying a cappuccino and slice of red velvet cake, freshly made by Angela's 21-year-old daughter Molly, Sugar Mouse's newly appointed co-director.

Such broad appeal is no accident. From the moment Angela opened her

business in the autumn of 2010, she planted its roots firmly in the community. "I wanted somewhere everyone would feel welcome," explains Angela, now affectionately nicknamed 'Mrs Sugar Mouse'. So, just as the shop caters for every sweet tooth, it also suits any budget, meaning you can leave with a £5 bar of luxury chocolate or some Haribo jellies and flying saucers – both packaged in a Cellophane bag, with a candy-pink bow.

### TURNING POINT

Days spent as Mrs Sugar Mouse, filling sweet hampers and whipping up hot chocolates and ice-cream sundaes, seem a long way from Angela's old life: "I was the first female crime correspondent on the *Yorkshire Post* – exciting but stressful," she says. "I dreamed of running a tearoom with gingham tablecloths." But leaving the security of a well-paid job is hard, so it wasn't until June 2010, when Angela was a freelancer and many of her employers brought writing jobs in-house, that she saw her window of opportunity. "When I was told the work would return in six months, I realised I could either take an







enforced holiday or spend time setting up my own business.”

Easingwold already had some successful cafés, so Angela struck on the idea of a sweet shop. When space came up for rent in the village, she took on the lease and used her husband Barry’s work bonus, and her family’s help to decorate the shop.

Two months later, Sugar Mouse opened its doors, its walls painted Farrow & Ball shades of chocolate and cream, and shelves stocked with traditional favourites and local confections such as Pontefract Cakes, and luxury Amelia Rope chocolates. A queue of children snaking out of the door, faces pressed against the shop front glass, soon became a common sight. When Angela started to receive offers for freelance writing six months later as promised, it was too late; she was already hooked.

In keeping with her ethos of being at the heart of the community, at Halloween Sugar Mouse reopened in the evening, and Angela and her friend Shiona, who works there part time, gave away jelly spiders and cocoa to passing trick-or-treaters. “The children had to stand outside with their drinks. I thought, I need a bigger space!” The 🐭





opportunity arose in November 2012, when premises became available on the square. “We were just moving into profit, so I had a sleepless night trying to decide whether it was worth the risk. I decided it was,” Angela says. Sugar Mouse relocated in two days and now fills the space with a counter selling Yorkshire ice cream and a café serving coffee and Molly’s cakes. “I love working with Molly,” says Angela, who also has a 24-year-old daughter, Hannah, the one behind the Sugar Mouse name.

There is a buzz about the shop, and it all comes back to Angela’s belief that you can have a successful business that supports the community. So, rather than advertising, she relies on word of mouth, organising local events and fundraising: “I may not become a millionaire, but I’m not in it for the money, I’m in it for the happiness.”

 **Sugar Mouse Luxury Confectionery**  
(01347 822818; [sugar-mouse.co.uk](http://sugar-mouse.co.uk)).



## My path to success



### BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

The finances. I set up on a small budget (£8,000) because I wanted to know that if it didn't work out, I could walk away without worrying how to keep a roof over my head. We still don't take a salary – I use what I need for food and petrol, then invest the rest straight back into the business.

### FAVOURITE MOMENT?

To celebrate Sugar Mouse's first birthday, we sold tickets for a huge *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*-themed party in the school hall. Everyone dressed up, and we made a tower of 250 cupcakes and handed out free sweets. The profits paid for a new sports kit for the school's netball team.

### WHAT IS YOUR BESTSELLER?

Blueberry bonbons just fly off the shelf. I refill the jar three times a week – the equivalent of 12kg

per month! I think it's the colour more than anything; blue sweets seem so naughty!

### AND YOUR PERSONAL PREFERENCE?

The Finnish Salt liquorice diamonds. I don't dare take a bag home with me but when I'm in the shop, I can't resist a sample.

### DO YOU FEEL PRESSURED TO INTRODUCE 'HEALTH-CONSCIOUS' ITEMS?

Sweet shops are all about treats and, as long as they are enjoyed in moderation, there's no harm in having a little of what you fancy. But we also sell no-added-sugar chocolates and truffles, and gluten-free and vegetarian hampers.

### ADVICE FOR OTHERS?

Start small so you don't overstretch yourself trying to achieve your vision at once. Customers enjoy watching the business grow.



# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP:

## *sweet shop*

### SOURCING PRODUCTS

**MAKING** At first, focus on one or two varieties such as hard, chewy, soft or sticky. Ask local friends and family what they like to eat but have difficulty finding. Fudge and nougat are simple to make in different flavours. Then be creative with your packaging; bagged sweets in Cellophane, and tied with colourful ribbons, will sell at a higher price than loose sweets.

### **DON'T FORGET HIDDEN COSTS**

You'll need equipment and a suitable preparation area. As demand grows, you may require a more professional workspace, so bear this in mind when forecasting business costs.

**CERTIFICATION** Notify your local council's environmental health officer, who will be able to carry out a free inspection, and offer advice on handling food allergies and the appropriate labelling of food packaging.

**BUYING** You could source sweets from a supplier such as Bonds of London ([bonds-confectionery.com](http://bonds-confectionery.com)), Gardiners of Scotland ([gardeners-scotland.com](http://gardeners-scotland.com)) or your local cash and carry. Ask about minimum order sizes – useful when you're

just starting out – and whether they provide free samples.

### SELLING YOUR STOCK

**ONLINE** Develop a website with high-quality images of your sweets. You may choose to employ a designer to build the site for you, or use a website provider such as [weebly.com](http://weebly.com) or [wix.com](http://wix.com), where you can customise a basic template to create the right look and feel, and make sales.

**PHYSICAL STORE** Look for a site in a location with good footfall and neighbouring shops that offer complementary products, and kit it out in a style that suits your intended customer. Train staff to deliver a professional and friendly service, and get as involved as you can with activities in the area to publicise the business.

**WHOLESALE** Approach food halls, confectionery departments and gift shops, and ask them to stock your products and sell them for you.

### PROMOTE AND GROW

**MARKET YOURSELF** Whether you choose to sell online or not, you still need to

publicise your business: use Pinterest to show off your sweets and share your influences, enter competitions including the Great Taste Awards or those at the BBC Good Food Show, attend events and food festivals, and make the most of industry festivals, such as Chocolate Week in October ([chocolateweek.co.uk](http://chocolateweek.co.uk)), which give you a promotion hook.

**USE SOCIAL MEDIA** Spread the word about events and

special offers via Facebook and Twitter.

**BE SEASONAL** Find new ways of making sales by packaging sweets for summer shows, launching limited-edition ranges for occasions such as Easter, Valentine's Day and Christmas. Look beyond the UK to meet the demand from tourists, who have visited the country and want to source specialist confectionery again, or expats living overseas.







DREAM BUSINESS

# THE TEAROOM

Combining her love of making cakes with a strong vision, Judith West created the perfect recipe for a traditional eatery with a contemporary twist

WORDS BY **EMMA PRITCHARD** ● PHOTOGRAPHS BY **NOEL MURPHY**



From a tiny galley kitchen comes the delicate sound of clinking bone china and the comforting aroma of steeping tea leaves and still-warm scones. Suddenly, the hushed murmurs in the room next door become a crescendo of 'oohs' and 'ahhs' as a series of intricately decorated cakes and dainty sandwiches are brought out in swift succession. It can mean only one thing: the Folly Tearoom in the Norfolk market town of Holt is open. And those lucky enough to have a table are in for a treat.

"I never imagined I'd run my own tearoom," says Judith West, as her customers decide where to start – will it be the crab-filled finger-sandwiches or a fruit scone with clotted cream and plum and cinnamon jam? "I didn't think it was possible to make a living from such an enjoyable pastime." A single ➡







parent for many years, it was only when Judith's children William and Jonathan were older that the idea to go self-employed started to formulate. "I was working in sales for an art gallery but wanted flexibility," she says. So when she heard of a derelict 18th-century coachyard, metres from the high street, she decided to take a look. "There were stable blocks, coal sheds and a beautiful beamed barn. I could just see my vintage-inspired tearoom, opening onto a walled garden."

### BEHIND THE SCENES

She placed a sealed bid to buy the property; one month later, it was hers. However, following the excitement came two years of knocking down walls, fighting damp and applying

limewash rendering as the buildings were renovated to form five retail units (which are let out to independent start-ups), a self-catering cottage and, of course, the tearoom.

Unmissable as you enter the tearoom are the striking budgerigar-print wallpaper and distinctive lampshades, created by Norfolk artists Belynda Sharples and Helen Kenning. Much of the vintage china is donated by customers, and Folly's logo, a quirky take on Victorian animal engravings, is inspired by the work of Judith's artistic son William.

Judith's menu is fun and creative: "Every meal is an occasion – we even serve our breakfasts on three-tiered stands." As with the interior furnishings, ingredients are sourced as locally as possible, with eggs from

her own four hens, while the 22 unique tea blends include lavender, rosebuds, elderberries and cornflowers. "They're made for me by a master blender in Kent," Judith says. She also plans to offer customers the chance to create their own individual mixes.

### THE PERFECT BREW

Today the tearoom's unique qualities are proving successful and it's hard to imagine it any other way. "In the first month after opening, we barely saw anyone," Judith admits. "I was sending my staff home with leftover cakes. But then summer arrived and so did coachloads of tourists. We've been rushed off our feet ever since." She now often begins baking at 4am and employs six part-time members of staff, depending on the time of





IN ORDER TO STAND OUT,  
JUDITH COMMISSIONED  
A MASTER TEA BLENDER





year, all trained to make scones to her exacting standards. Caroline Champion now helps to manage the shop.

As she enters her third year, Judith is already looking forward to exciting developments for the business: she has recently unveiled an orangery-style extension, which is available for private parties; and plans for a regular pop-up shop to sell the tea blends are coming to fruition, as well as a mobile vintage-style tea catering service.

The old-fashioned bell jangles cheerily as more customers arrive and Judith welcomes them in. But does earning a living from a hobby mean the enjoyment diminishes? "I get as much pleasure from baking now as I ever did," she says, as she dusts the flour off her dress, ready to take another order. ☰

 **Folly Tearoom** (01263 713569; [follytearoom.co.uk](http://follytearoom.co.uk)).



## My path to success

### WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE?

Spending my time in the kitchen and front of house is a juggling act, which I'm still trying to master. I love meeting and greeting but I also like to know everything is baked to high standards. I find it hard learning to let go and put trust in others.

### WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU'D KNOWN BEFORE STARTING OUT?

I realise now that a company is only ever as good as its

staff, so it's really important to make sure you have a strong team who share your enthusiasm and passion – especially in peak periods. I wasn't expecting the business to grow so quickly and would have been lost without the valuable support of those around me.

### WHAT HAS BEEN A HIGHLIGHT SO FAR?

I never tire of seeing the expressions on customers' faces when their afternoon

tea is brought out. There are also a number of people who visit each week and have become good friends of mine.

### WHAT'S THE BEST THING ABOUT YOUR JOB?

Taking afternoon tea is now part of my market research! I try out different places wherever I go to get ideas and inspiration for my own menu, and to assess what I'm doing well and the areas I could improve on.



### DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR OTHERS WHO WOULD LIKE TO DO THE SAME THING?

Be prepared to work hard but also to delegate. My days are at least 12 hours long, so I now outsource tasks, such as laundering.



# SMALL BUSINESS START-UP

## tearoom

### HOW TO START

#### **PRIORITISE YOUR LOCATION**

Choose sites where people are engaged in another activity such as shopping, sightseeing and walking, and therefore likely to want some spontaneous refreshment. It need not necessarily be a busy high street.

#### **ENSURE YOU STAND OUT**

Perhaps you could serve 1950s-inspired afternoon teas in an appropriate setting, or opt for a Victorian theme? Plan the layout and create your interior design scheme for free with clever websites such as [floorplanner.com](http://floorplanner.com).

#### **BUDGET FOR HIDDEN COSTS**

Dishwashers, fridges, crockery and furnishings all add up when kitting out your tearoom. Keep outgoings to a minimum by buying secondhand where suitable – try [secondhand-catering-equipment.co.uk](http://secondhand-catering-equipment.co.uk).

#### **BUILD A STRONG TEAM**

Your staff are your best ambassadors, so train them before your first customer has even walked through the door. Ensure they can answer questions about your menu and promote items that you're particularly keen to sell.

**OFFER ADDED EXTRAS** Feature special teas, host tastings and source unique suppliers



to give customers a reason to come back to you over similar businesses in the area.

### EXPANDING IDEAS

**KNOW YOUR INDUSTRY** Attend a tea masterclass and tasting such as those run by The UK Tea Council to find out how teas are made, the differences between loose and bagged varieties, and how to brew the perfect cup – important skills to have when selecting a supplier.

#### **SATISFY YOUR CUSTOMERS**

Pay other businesses

like yours in your area anonymous visits and compare the quality of their décor, service, menu and atmosphere. Do they do anything particularly well that you could recreate, but improve?

#### **PERFECT YOUR PRESENTATION**

Touches such as homemade jam and local artwork on the walls will set your tearoom apart from others in the area, but the external appearance is equally important.

**THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX** Build your business during quiet times of day by marketing

it as a venue for workshop companies and clubs, who can use it when you don't.

#### **INVEST IN AN ONLINE PRESENCE**

Your website is often someone's first point of contact with your service, so make it informative and attractive with a photograph of the bustling interior.

### LEARNING MORE

Whether you want to start a business or develop a skill, there's a course to enjoy...

#### **BETTYS COOKERY SCHOOL, HARROGATE, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

Give traditional treats a contemporary twist with one of the many baking courses at this award-winning venue (01423 814016; [bettyscookeryschool.co.uk](http://bettyscookeryschool.co.uk)).

#### **JANE PETTIGREW MASTERCLASSES, THE CHESTERFIELD MAYFAIR HOTEL, LONDON**

Join tea specialist Jane Pettigrew and find out about the history of tea, plus discover the best varieties to buy (020 8672 4020; [janepettigrew.com](http://janepettigrew.com)).

**MISS SUE FLAY, CAMBRIDGE** Milk then tea, or tea then milk? Discover the answer, and more traditional tea practices, at one of Sue Flay's etiquette workshops, which she runs in person or via a webcam, so you can do it from home ([misssueflay.com](http://misssueflay.com)).



## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE #10:

# *Expanding your business*

**SO, YOUR BUSINESS HAS BECOME BUSIER,** you have loyal customers, trustworthy suppliers, increasing sales, some profit and a good relationship with your bank manager – it is likely that you want it to grow. You're in a good position.

**THE ANSWER IS NOT ALWAYS OBVIOUS.** Remember, you don't have to grow; many entrepreneurs decide to remain at a level that works for them. Perhaps you are making enough profit to fund the lifestyle you want, maybe there are other aspects of your life that you want to keep time for, or it could be that doing what you love is enough.

**IF YOU DO DECIDE THAT EXPANDING THE BUSINESS IS THE RIGHT DECISION,** you will need to plan how you are going to get from the point you are at now to where you want to be. Growing nearly always means building the assets, then either selling or passing a healthy business on to

family members. You need to decide where you want the enterprise to be five, ten and 20 years in the future, then work backwards from the end point. Take a good long look at the business and decide what your exit strategy is – that is, where you want your journey to conclude.

### **IMAGINE YOU MAKE BREAD AT HOME AND SELL IT LOCALLY.**

Your assets (in the eyes of the bank or potential purchaser) are perhaps a van, some recipes and kitchen utensils. What you are really selling is those few items, the goodwill you have

built up with customers and suppliers, and your knowledge (recipes and techniques). They are unlikely to pay a great deal for the business. But you do have the satisfaction of passing over something you have built up with hard work.

**NOW SUPPOSE YOU ARE WORKING TOWARDS SELLING THE BUSINESS;** over the next five years, you lease a small factory unit with well-maintained equipment, you have reliable suppliers and a trusted employee who can manage the business when you are away. You have several more routes

to market – fairs, local shops, restaurants and cafés – and a computerised accounting system. The business looks very different to a potential buyer, the operation and profit is transparent and, although all your passion is still there, it doesn't depend on you to survive. This is something that a potential buyer can borrow on; it adds value to the sale price.

**CALCULATE WHAT GROWTH MIGHT LOOK LIKE TO YOUR BUSINESS.** Start with today and work out what the assets of the business are currently worth to a potential purchaser. If you are convinced that growth is the right decision for you, it's necessary to plan for achieving maximum assets within your five-, ten- or 20-year time frame.

**MOST SMALL ENTERPRISES GROW ORGANICALLY.** Just do more of what you already do – it works as it is, so you just have to find a way to sell more of your product.

● **IT'S A FAMILIAR SITUATION FOR EVERY COMPANY FROM EMMA BRIDGEWATER TO BODEN.** *The time comes when it is right to expand. There are risks involved in doing so and it is certainly hard work, but, armed with the right information and skills, none of the challenges are insurmountable. Before you embark on this second part of your business journey, spend some time thinking about why you want to grow – is it right for you?*



# THE THREE WAYS TO GROW

## HORIZONTAL

This term usually means growing your product range. Your bakery could offer cakes, brioche or sausage rolls. You already have people who love your products, so they are likely to buy others. The best way to do this is usually to talk to your customers: the next time someone asks you for an item you don't stock, make a note and ask where they currently buy them from. Do that for a couple of months and then review what there is most demand for. Revisit your original market research, especially the competition. Have these businesses changed since you started? What has the impact of your business been? If everyone is suddenly selling artisan bread, you are doing something right. Then look at the market rates and work out what you can charge and what sort of profit you will make, given that you will be increasing production and possibly adding staff. Beware of greatly increasing your product range suddenly and starting to sell everything your customers ask for. You will not grow if you spend time making products that only a few people buy.

## VERTICAL

Examining and taking more control of the value chain sums up this approach, which means taking stock of all the actions and ingredients that make up the product that the customer walks away with. For the baking business, this might mean looking at the raw materials that are at the start of the value chain and considering becoming your own miller or importing flour. This reduces your costs and gives you another product to sell (to other aspiring artisan bakers). It could also involve looking at the latter part of the value chain and opening a shop, for example. This may reduce the cost of each sale, give you more time to attract the customer, extra space for stock and additional control over the relationship.

## ACQUISITION

This growth method involves buying another business. Acquisition isn't just for big companies – it is quick and effective, and brings a ready supply of new customers, suppliers and routes to market. However, it usually needs a lump sum investment and the ability to change overnight. The investor will want to know how you are going to improve the



enterprise that you are buying, why you are the right person for the job and how you are going to manage the change. Finding and persuading a funder will be a considerable amount of work and you'll need a much more in-depth business plan. However, don't dismiss acquisition as a way to grow.

### **ALL THREE OF THE ABOVE METHODS IN EFFECT CREATE A NEW OR DIFFERENT BUSINESS;**

this will mean investment, more risk, a greater call on your time, increased rules and regulations (especially around employment) and, possibly, a change in direction. When you started your business, it was a case of summoning your courage and taking the leap – this is just the same but you know more now, you're in a better position with funders, you have customers and are aware of what to expect. So what are you waiting for?



# Directory

Use this index of organisations, government departments and websites to help you get your idea off the ground

## GENERAL

### THE ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH

**INSURERS** Represents various providers of cover for businesses (020 7600 3333; [abi.org.uk](http://abi.org.uk))

### BRITISH CHAMBERS OF

**COMMERCE** Help for independent businesses nationwide (020 7654 5800; [britishchambers.org.uk](http://britishchambers.org.uk))

### BRITISH LIBRARY AND IP CENTRE

Advice on copyright, patents and how to protect your brand (020 7412 7901; [bl.uk/bipc](http://bl.uk/bipc))

### BUSINESS IS GREAT

HM Government support, advice and inspiration for growing a business (0300 456 3565; [greatbusiness.gov.uk](http://greatbusiness.gov.uk))

### COMPANIES HOUSE

Government department handling the registration of businesses and the setting up of limited companies ([gov.uk/government/organisations/companies-house](http://gov.uk/government/organisations/companies-house))

### CROWDFUNDER

Online platform for collective funding for projects and businesses ([crowdfunder.co.uk](http://crowdfunder.co.uk))

### ENTERPRISE NATION

Workshops and online assistance for start-ups (01743 272555; [enterprisenation.com](http://enterprisenation.com))



### FEDERATION OF SMALL BUSINESSES

Professional services and support (0808 20 20 888; [fsb.org.uk](http://fsb.org.uk))

### HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE

Information about these issues in the workplace ([hse.gov.uk](http://hse.gov.uk))

### HM REVENUE AND CUSTOMS

Details on company and self-employed tax ([gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs](http://gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs))

**KICKSTARTER** Crowdfunding for creative projects ([kickstarter.com](http://kickstarter.com))

### MARKETING DONUT

Comprehensive online marketing assistance and information for small businesses ([marketingdonut.co.uk](http://marketingdonut.co.uk))

**MENTORS ME** Site with a search facility for businesses looking for mentors ([mentorsme.co.uk](http://mentorsme.co.uk))

**PLUNKETT FOUNDATION** Events, inspirational case studies

and funding for rural entrepreneurs (01993 810730; [plunkett.co.uk](http://plunkett.co.uk))

**THE PRINCE'S TRUST** Enterprise support programme for people aged 18-30 ([princes-trust.org.uk](http://princes-trust.org.uk))

### SCHOOL FOR STARTUPS

Courses and loans for entrepreneurs of 18 years and over (020 7759 1916; [schoolforstartups.co.uk](http://schoolforstartups.co.uk))

**START UP LOANS** Government funding and mentoring (0300 456 3565; [startuploans.co.uk](http://startuploans.co.uk))

### SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY

Supporting enterprises in their communities and encouraging the 'shop local' campaign ([smallbusinessaturdayuk.com](http://smallbusinessaturdayuk.com))

### TRADING STANDARDS INSTITUTE

Training and online advice in consumer protection and compliance (0345 404 0506; [tradingstandards.gov.uk](http://tradingstandards.gov.uk))

**VIRGIN STARTUPS** A not-for-profit company that provides funding of up to £25,000, plus assistance and mentoring for fledgling businesses ([virginstartup.org](http://virginstartup.org))

### WOMEN IN RURAL ENTERPRISE

**(WIRE)** Networking groups, business advice and support, plus workshops and events (01952 815338; [wireuk.org](http://wireuk.org))



## FOOD & DRINK

**BIG BARN** Food-and-drink-related news, plus an online directory and map of British producers, farmers' markets and independent retailers (01480 890970; [bigbarn.co.uk](http://bigbarn.co.uk))

### **FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY**

Definitive guidance and support on hygiene, and the certification of the workplace and products (020 7276 8829; [food.gov.uk](http://food.gov.uk))

### **NATIONWIDE CATERERS ASSOCIATION**

Trade association with resources and assistance for food businesses nationwide (0121 603 2524; [ncass.org.uk](http://ncass.org.uk))

### **SCHOOL OF ARTISAN FOOD**

Wide range of food and business courses taught by experienced artisans (01909 532171; [schoolofartisanfood.org](http://schoolofartisanfood.org))

### **THE SOIL ASSOCIATION**

Technical advice and help for organic producers (0117 314 5000; [soilassociation.org](http://soilassociation.org))

**STREETFOOD** Guides, support and directory listing for outside catering businesses (0121 603 2524; [streetfood.org.uk](http://streetfood.org.uk))



**WOMEN'S FARM AND GARDEN ASSOCIATION** Membership network of growers ([wfga.org.uk](http://wfga.org.uk))

### **CRAFT THE CRAFTS COUNCIL**

Information about exhibitions, events and competitions (020 7806 2500; [craftscouncil.org.uk](http://craftscouncil.org.uk))

**CRAFT FAIRS UK** Arts and crafts community with nationwide resources and listings of events ([ukcraftfairs.com](http://ukcraftfairs.com))

**WEST DEAN** Part- and full-time craft courses (bursaries available), plus related events (01243 811301; [westdean.org.uk](http://westdean.org.uk))

**UK CRAFT BLOG** Tips and inspiration from a wide range of UK bloggers ([ukcraftblog.com](http://ukcraftblog.com))

## GARDENING

### **BRITISH FLORIST ASSOCIATION**

Workshops, competitions and nationwide networking opportunities (0844 800 7299; [britishfloristassociation.org](http://britishfloristassociation.org))

**DEFRA** Statistics, news and contacts for related enterprises (search 'Defra' at [gov.uk](http://gov.uk))

**FLOWERONA** UK blog for flower inspiration and design tips ([flowerona.com](http://flowerona.com))

**ROYAL HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY** Courses, expert online guidance and gardening publications (0845 260 5000; [rhs.org.uk](http://rhs.org.uk))

**SMALLHOLDER MAGAZINE** News and advice for small-scale producers ([smallholder.co.uk](http://smallholder.co.uk))

**SOCIETY OF GARDEN DESIGNERS** An association for UK practitioners ([sgd.org.uk](http://sgd.org.uk))







## BEAUTY COSMETIC, TOILETRY & PERFUMERY ASSOCIATION

**(CTPA)** Represents companies that make, supply and sell beauty products (020 7491 8891; [ctpa.org.uk](http://ctpa.org.uk))

**CSA COSMETIC SAFETY ASSESSORS** Resources for manufacturers of cosmetics to find an appropriate professional ([csa-cosmetic-safetyassessors.weebly.com](http://csa-cosmetic-safetyassessors.weebly.com))

**GUILD OF CRAFT SOAP & TOILETRY MAKERS** Membership support group ([gcstm.co.uk](http://gcstm.co.uk))

**HERB & HEDGEROW** Blog for people involved with natural and organic skincare ([herbhedgerow.co.uk](http://herbhedgerow.co.uk))

**SCHOOL OF NATURAL SKINCARE** Online courses and help for beauty businesses ([schoolof-naturalskincare.com](http://schoolof-naturalskincare.com))

**THE COSMETIC PRODUCTS (SAFETY) REGULATIONS** HM Government guide to laws and regulations (search 'Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations' at [legislation.gov.uk](http://legislation.gov.uk))

## OPENING A PREMISES BRITISH RETAIL CONSORTIUM

Trade association that represents the entire retail industry ([brc.org.uk](http://brc.org.uk))

**ESTATES GAZETTE** News and data service for finding commercial properties in the UK ([estatesgazette.com](http://estatesgazette.com))

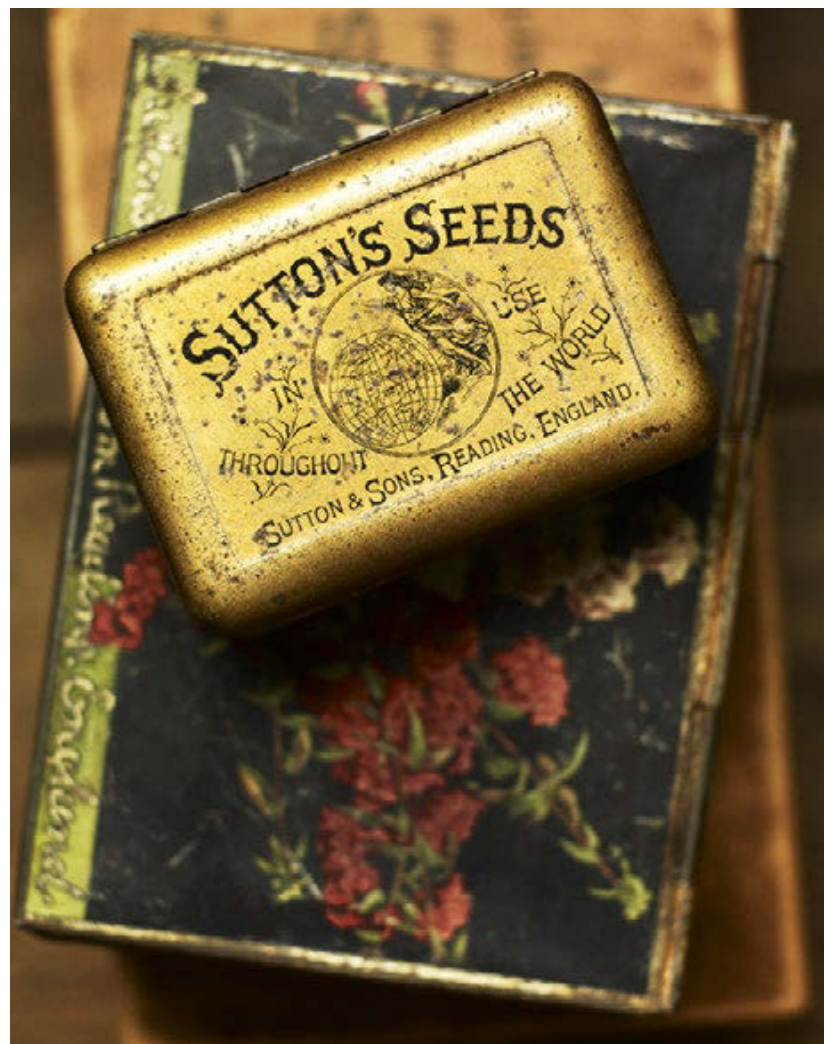
**NATIONAL MARKET TRADERS FEDERATION** Represents market and street traders; also offers retailers resources and training ([nmtf.co.uk](http://nmtf.co.uk))

**PLANNING PORTAL** Guide to property and change of use ([planningportal.gov.uk](http://planningportal.gov.uk))

**RETAIL BUSINESS GUIDES** Advice on opening various retail businesses ([startups.co.uk/](http://startups.co.uk/) [retail-business-guides](http://retail-business-guides))

**SALE AND SUPPLY OF GOODS ACT** Rules that retailers and sellers must abide by (search 'Sale and Supply of Goods Act' at [legislation.gov.uk](http://legislation.gov.uk))

**THE DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT** Guide to this piece of legislation for businesses ([equalityhumanrights.com](http://equalityhumanrights.com))



## COLLECTING

**ANTIQUES WEBSITE** Online directory with listings of antiques, collectibles, professionals and events ([antiqueswebsite.co.uk](http://antiqueswebsite.co.uk))

**ARTHUR SWALLOW FAIRS** Vintage and salvage fairs across the country ([arthurswallowfairs.co.uk](http://arthurswallowfairs.co.uk))

**INTERNATIONAL ANTIQUES & COLLECTORS FAIRS** A site listing UK events ([iacf.co.uk](http://iacf.co.uk))

**LAPADA** The UK's largest trade association for professional art and antiques dealers ([lapada.org](http://lapada.org))

**LASSCO (LASSCO.CO.UK)** A site with architectural antiques and salvage items for sale.

**MILLERS ANTIQUES** Definitive guide to antiques and collectibles with a blog and an event guide ([millersantiquesguide.com](http://millersantiquesguide.com))

## Additional reading



Gain the practical advice and inspiration you need to earn a living from your hobby, or simply explore a pastime and passion further, with *Country Living's* series of *Turn Your Talent into a Business* books, published by Brightword (available from [harriman-house.com](http://harriman-house.com)):

### TURN YOUR TALENT INTO A BUSINESS

by Emma Jones

### COOK WRAP SELL

by Bruce McMichael

### DESIGN GROW SELL

by Sophie Davies

### DESIGN CREATE SELL

by Alison Lewy

And don't miss the *Let Your Talent Shine* series in every issue of *Country Living* (see page 2 for details of a great subscription offer to the magazine)





# COUNTRY LIVING *general store*



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